



THE JESSE JAMES STORIES

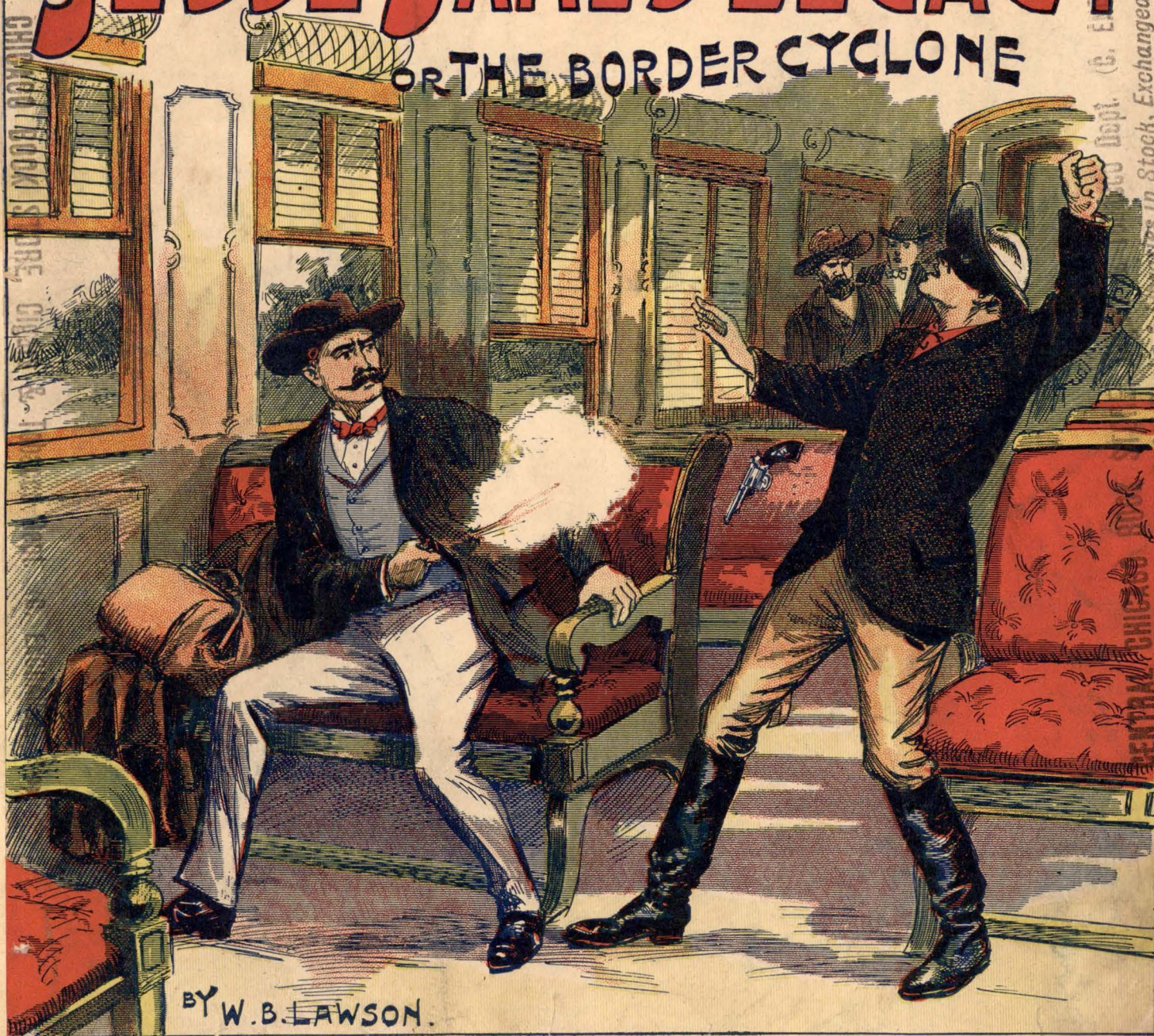
ORIGINAL NARRATIVES OF THE JAMES BOYS

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JESSE JAMES' LEGACY

OR THE BORDER CYCLONE



BY W. B. LAWSON.

THERE CAME THE SHARP REPORT OF A PISTOL, AND THE ROBBER, WITH A GROAN, STAGGERED BACK.

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JESSE JAMES' LEGACY;

OR,

The Border Cyclone.

By W. B. LAWSON.

CHAPTER I.

THE BANDIT'S COMMISSION.

"Mack, come here!"

The speaker was Jesse James, and his strongly marked face was grave as the words left his lips.

The time was Sunday the 26th of March, just eight days before an event that led to the belief that at last the noted bandit and train robber had been done for. This was a mistake, but Jesse James encouraged the belief and laid low. The place, Jesse James' house in St. Joseph, Missouri.

The man to whom the request was made left his seat by the window of the front apartment, where he had been sitting in a brown study, and came over to the fireplace before which Jesse was standing.

He was tall and well made, and had a face that was both handsome and prepossessing in spite of the lines of dissipation about the mouth and under the eyes.

And yet his countenance belied his character, for he

was one of the most conscienceless villains that had ever cursed the Southwest with his presence.

Corey Mack, or Iron Mack, as he was better known, both on account of his superb muscular development and his fierce, unbending will, could smile the frank, open smile of a guileless and honest young man, and yet do cruel murder while yet the lips were curved in seeming gayety and good humor.

A consummate actor as well as a remorseless villain, he was the most feared by the officers and the people generally of all the later members of Jesse James' reckless band of desperadoes.

"Mack, my boy," said the robber chief, when the young man had come forward and bent his dark eyes questioningly upon the other's face, "I have a commission to give you to fill in case I am not able to. I have a presentiment that I'm going to have a tight squeeze before long."

"Pshaw!" returned Iron Mack, in the soft, sympathetic voice that he knew so well how to use when occasion

required, "you are good for twenty years yet. You're well, hearty, and you haven't lost your grip by a large majority. Presentiments be blown! Your stomach's out of order, Jess, and that's what ails you, and nothing else."

"No," said Jesse James, "it's not my stomach, Mack, that's given me the idea. I've had a warning that one of my men is going to betray me."

"Take a thimbleful of old rye and you'll change your tune."

Iron Mack looked at the glum-visaged outlaw with an amused smile.

"I tell you what, Jess," he said, after a pause, "you're rusting from inaction, and your mind will go to pieces soon if you don't get in and do some work of the old kind. What's the matter with the raid you'd planned on the bank at Platte City?"

"We will talk of that after the middle of April. If I am alive by the fifteenth the raid goes."

"All right. Suit yourself."

Jesse James gazed thoughtfully into the fire for awhile, and his expression was hard and stern when he again looked up.

"Mack," he said, with fierce earnestness, "if I did not think a heap of you, I wouldn't ask you to do this for me."

Affecting to humor the noted outlaw's mood, the young men asked, quickly:

"What do you want me to do?"

"I want you to find a certain man and cut his heart out for me—that is, if I'm not able to attend to it."

Jesse James' countenance expressed such unrelenting ferocity as he said this that Iron Mack, callous and case-hardened as he was, shuddered and turned slightly pale.

"Who is the man?" he queried, with assumed coolness.

"Perry Bowdeen."

"Never heard of him."

"He was once a member of this band."

"That was before my time, then."

"Yes; and he only remained with us for a few months—long enough," added Jesse James, with savage emphasis, "to show his traitorous designs and at the same time serve me the most contemptible, low down trick that one man can play upon another."

"What was it?"

"Don't get impatient"—for Iron Mack was now exhibiting the keenest interest in the recital—"and I will get to it soon enough. First let me tell you what he did to the band."

"Betrayed you all to the officers, likely."

"That's what the skunk did, Mack, and if it hadn't been for Jim Cummings' cool nerve, Perry Bowdeen would have got away with his trick and I might be dead now."

"It doesn't matter what Jim did," the outlaw chief went

on, "but the measures he took prevented Bowdeen from delivering me and Frank and Polk Wells over to the sheriff of Liberty County. On the day the racket came off, where do you think the traitor was?"

"With the officers, of course."

"Not he, the coward!"

Jesse James grated his teeth at the recollection of his enemy's actions.

"He was twenty miles away working his dirty game on me, Mack. And now I'll let you know just the kind of a man Perry Bowdeen is, so that you won't have at compunction in doing him up when you meet him."

"When he joined the band he pretended to think I was the greatest man in America. He didn't grovel and bow down before me, nor do the soft slobber act, for I would have tumbled to such games as these too quick; but he worked his points in a neat, easy, insinuating way that deceived everybody but Jim Cummings. Jim warned me to look out for Bowdeen, that he was a snake, and would play me a mean trick when the proper time came, but I would not listen to him, and stuck up for Bowdeen to the last."

Jesse James sighed deeply over the remembrance of his mistake.

"But wiser and better men than I have been gulled," he continued, with a weak attempt at a smile, "and may be that the rascal's smoothness and cunning would prove more than a match for your shrewdness and determination."

"I'll bet my life he won't fool me, once I get to see him and know him for the man who pulled the wool over your eyes," exclaimed Iron Mack, confidently.

"I hope he won't," said Jesse James, earnestly, "for I never be satisfied until he has received his deserts."

"After he had won his way into my confidence," the outlaw resumed, "I told him all about my private affairs and his sympathy with my mother's troubles made cotton to him more than ever. Curse my blindness, I raged the outlaw chief as he walked from the fireplace the window and back again. "Thirty years of active fighting, scheming life, with the finest opportunities in the world to study human nature, and then allow myself to be downed at last by a snipe that is young enough to be my son. It gravels me like the old scratch to think of it, Mack."

His companion tried to frame a consoling reply, but failed.

"The day before the officers made the raid according to his directions," continued Jesse James, "Perry Bowdeen went to a little town twenty miles distant to see a girl whom I had introduced to him. That girl was my wife, the daughter of a man who had once befriended me, and who had died of consumption when she was four-

She was now sixteen, as pretty as a picture, and as innocent and trustful as a dove. What do you think the villain did?"

"I can't guess."

"In the first place, he put a forged letter into her hands."

"Whose writing was forged?"

"Mine."

"Ah! I begin to see."

"No you don't, Mack. The letter instructed her to leave the good woman with whom she was living as companion and start immediately for St. Joseph with the bearer. Alice Lepugh obeyed without one suspicion that a dastardly trick was being played upon her."

"It was night when she started in a buggy with Perry Bowdeen over the lonely road that led to St. Joseph. It was daylight when they found her lying by the roadside, dishonored and dead."

A choking sensation in the outlaw's throat made him cease speaking.

Iron Mack pressed his hand compassionately.

"You want me to find and kill this man, you said?" was his quiet remark.

"Yes."

"I'll do it, and if you get after him, too, one of us ought to nail him."

"Thank you."

"I'll do it," pursued Iron Mack, with a fierce gleam in his dark eyes, "if I have to hunt him from Missouri to China."

Jesse James regarded his companion in wonder and admiration.

"I knew I could depend on you, Mack," he said, with deep earnestness; "but I did not count on your accepting the task so quickly and eagerly."

"Alice Lepugh was my cousin."

"What!"

"She was my cousin, but I never knew what became of her after her father died. I was in Arizona at the time, and I suppose I might have learned that you had taken charge of her if I had taken the trouble to inquire."

Jesse James smiled with satisfaction.

"No need to make you swear to avenge my wrongs now," he said.

"Perhaps not; but," with a cold, merciless expression on his handsome face, and a quick hardening of his voice, "I'll swear anyhow. Listen!"

He caught Jesse James' hands, and as he held them fiercely in his own, said in a low, hissing voice:

"If I fail to hunt him, or to take his life when I get him into my power, then I hope I may die in a pot of boiling oil, and that Perry Bowdeen may chuck me in, and that he may secure a cool place within sight of sheol,

where he may gleefully watch the devil while he roasts my soul."

Not a word was spoken after this for some minutes.

Then Iron Mack said, slowly:

"I haven't asked you for Perry Bowdeen's description yet. Perhaps you had better give it to me now."

"Yes, yes, I came near forgetting that, for like as not he goes by another name at the present time. He is a stoutish fellow, not so tall as you are, Mack, and yet he is above the average height—about five feet eight, I should say."

"What about his complexion?"

"It is light, and his hair and mustache are sandy-colored."

"Eyes?"

"Brown, or hazel."

"Nose?"

"Ordinary; neither Roman nor Grecian."

"Any distinguishing marks?"

"Yes, a long, flat scar under the right ear, extending half-way down the jaw."

"Good. There's no chance of my letting a man go by who wears that mark."

"As for other——" The sentence was not finished, for at that moment the door of the cottage opened and Bob Ford entered.

Iron Mack turned to greet him with a flushed face, but he soon calmed down when he saw by the expression of Ford's face that the latter had not overheard what had been said in the room.

On the 4th of April Mack was in Kansas City.

The mornings papers' scareheads announced that Jesse James had fallen before Bob Ford's traitorous pistol never to rise again.

Both he and, for that matter, practically every one in Missouri, believed the report, yet Jesse James, at that moment, lay alive and but slightly wounded in one of his haunts near Kansas City. Bob Ford had indeed attempted the outlaw's life, and through a curious mistake one of Jesse's companions had been mistaken for himself, and when the body was buried a tombstone was actually erected bearing Jesse James' name on it. The celebrated outlaw, however, took advantage of his supposed death to remain in hiding long enough to perfect some of his most daring schemes.

"The Fords will be after me next," Mack said to himself, "and as they have the whole force of the Government at their back, it will be good policy on my part to skip out of this part of the country for a while."

He lost no time in putting this design into execution, and was a passenger on the night express bound for Lawrence. Between Lanwood and Fall Leaf the train suddenly came to a standstill, and the sound of pistol shots

without, announced to the passengers that something out of the ordinary was taking place.

Iron Mack instantly divined that a gang of train robbers were at work.

While he was debating what course it would be best for him to pursue, a masked man entered the car with a pistol in each hand.

"Get in that corner, all of you"—pointing—"quick, or there'll be a bloody picnic here," he shouted, in a hoarse, commanding voice.

There were about a dozen passengers, all males, in the car, and the command was immediately obeyed by every one except Jesse James' follower and friend.

Iron Mack stuck to his seat and, looking calmly at the masked train robber, made several quick, mysterious signs.

If the robber had at any time been a member of Jesse James' band, or the trusted friend of a member, he would understand the signs and instantly respond.

But the man with the mask paid no attention to the signs.

On the contrary, he raised one of his revolvers and pointed it at the defiant Mack's head.

"I'll give you just five seconds," he hissed, "to get into that corner. One, two, three, four——"

Before the word "five" could be uttered there came the sharp report of a pistol, and the robber, with a groan, staggered back a few paces and then fell partially over the arm of a seat.

Instantly the passengers left the corner where they had been huddled together and started forward to offer their congratulations to the man who had so courageously come to their rescue.

Before they had taken a dozen steps they were greeted with a surprise greater than that which had been occasioned by the entrance of the masked robber.

Iron Mack confronted them with a brace of revolvers, and in his dark, glittering eyes there was a deadly meaning as he coldly uttered these startling words:

"Back to your corner. I am the boss of this train, and you'll have to pungle to me."

As the passengers shrank back to their former position, Iron Mack stepped back until he reached the side of the robber he had wounded.

The latter, who had been stunned by the bullet and not seriously hurt, rose to his feet as Mack approached, and, raising his right arm, would have fired had not this quick whisper reached his ears:

"Drop it! I'm with you on this racket."

Before the man with the mask could answer, the conductor and several train hands entered the car.

The attack on the train had been made by three men who had taken passage at Lanwood.

One of them had boarded the engine shortly after pulled out of the station, and, under threat of instant death, had induced the engineer to slow up.

When the train came to a standstill an attempt was made to kill the express messenger and rob the safe.

Two of the robbers attended to this part of the programme, using the fireman and engineer as shields, while the third entered the first passenger coach beyond baggage for the purpose of holding up the passengers, two of whom were rich cattle barons.

The third robber guessed how his companions fared when he saw the conductor's face at the door.

Crack! crack! went two pistols simultaneously.

Iron Mack shot at the same instant as the robber he had made a target of but a few moments before.

Down went the conductor with a bullet in his lung.

The shooting continued until the train hands, who had followed the conductor in, had been driven from the car.

"Now," said Iron Mack, in a tone of authority, to the masked companion, "you go outside and see that the engineer doesn't play any monkey games and I'll attend to these cattle here," indicating the passengers, with a contemptuous glance.

"Can I depend on you?"

"My name is Corey Mack," was the response, proudly given.

The masked man started.

"The man with the iron nerve," he muttered. "Yes, yes," raising his voice and speaking rapidly and cheerfully. "I'll trust you till Satan's black lake is coated with ice a mile thick. So long."

He was out of the car on the ground before Jesse James' friend had taken a step in the direction of the frightened passengers.

The after operations of the two robbers so strangely met were conducted with promptness and dispatch.

They met with no opposition, and when the engine started the train forward they were prepared to take the woods with some forty thousand dollars in coin and notes as a reward of their joint labors.

The two robbers who had accompanied the man with the mask lay dead in the express car.

Iron Mack said nothing to his companion until the latter had walked and run for several miles, and had reached a comparatively safe place in a creek bottom.

Here he produced a bull's-eye lantern, lighted it, and sitting down on the sandy bank, motioned his companion to do the same.

The latter pulled off his mask and showed a white beardless face, which was streaked with blood, which had run from the wound in the scalp produced by Iron Mack's bullet.

"If I had been directly facing you at the time you

shot," he said, complacently, "I would be a dead man now. As it was, I was turned partially sidewise, so that the bullet struck the bone and glanced off."

When the blood had been washed off, Iron Mack saw that the robber was a young man of about his own age, with dark hair, like his own, and eyes of a brownish hue.

Without understanding why he did so, Mack glanced at the man's cheeks, holding the lantern so that he could see every portion of the white skin from neck to temples plainly.

Smooth and clean, without any sign of a scar anywhere.

"And why should I expect to find a scar?" he said to himself in disgust, as he put the lantern down. "The man is not a blonde—he's dark, like myself. And, besides, the scoundrel who wronged both Jesse James and myself is probably a detective, while this fellow is on the turf and a thoroughbred besides."

"You look at me as if you thought you had seen me before somewhere," remarked the stranger, with a curious smile.

Iron Mack nodded his head.

"Being in the same line of business, it was not strange that I should hope to find an old acquaintance in you," he said, promptly.

"I am a Georgian," said the other. "This is my first job in Kansas."

"What is your name?"

"Caxton Bent."

"Rube Burrows' nephew?"

"That's what."

Iron Mack rose up and put out his hand.

"Shake, partner, for I'm proud to meet you."

Hand met hand in a hearty clasp.

CHAPTER II.

IRON MACK'S FIRST MOVE.

Two days later the two outlaws found themselves in Junction City.

"Let's go on to Denver and blow a few thousand," suggested Caxton Bent.

Iron Mack shook his head.

"Wait till we corral a hundred thousand apiece, and then we'll whirl in and give London and Paris a rattle."

"And Monte Carlo?"

"Of course."

"How are we to swipe the boodle? Twenty thousand a hand and eighty to get."

"There are lots of ways. Did you ever hear of Gib Yost, the safe burglar?"

"No, but I have seen and talked with Spike Hennessey."

Iron Mack turned up his nose.

"Hennessey is a back number," he said, with contempt. "His style of cracking safes is the old pioneer work—all night one. Drill a hole in the lock, then blow it off with a charge of powder or a dynamite bomb. Too much work, too much noise, and altogether too risky. We have improved on Hennessey since he quit the business and went on the stage. We have adopted Gib Yost's invention, and, as a consequence, have never failed to call the turn when rigged up ready for work."

"The best way to tackle a bank is to rush in in broad daylight and terrorize the officials in Jesse James' style."

"Yes," returned Iron Mack, approvingly, "that's a good way, and I think we'll try it, after we have given Gib Yost's invention a rattle. By the way, did you know Jesse?"

"Never saw him in my life."

"It's a pity."

Caxton Bent replied with a sneer:

"I don't think so."

"No? And why not?"

The great Missouri outlaw's former companion looked at the nephew of Rube Burrows rather coldly.

"Because he was overrated. Frank is a better man than Jesse was, and you are worth the pair of them and Jim Cummings thrown in."

Iron Mack's frown disappeared.

He could not withstand his companion's compliment upon his prowess and daring.

But presently his face grew dark again.

The thought of the promise he had made to Jesse James had suddenly obtruded itself.

"I reckon I won't go to Europe for a while," he slowly remarked, "unless," he added, "I happen to come across my man by the time I have put my clamhooks on the hundred thousand."

"Your man? What are you talking about?"

Caxton Bent's dark countenance expressed the most intense curiosity.

Iron Mack did not answer at once, for he was debating in his mind whether or not he should make a confidant of this partner of two days.

"If you are afraid to trust me," the man from Georgia curtly continued, "I think we had better separate at once."

"I will trust you," Mack said. And then on the impulse of the moment, and there appearing to be no good reason why he should not unbosom himself to the man who was probably destined to be his associate in crime for many months, perhaps years, Iron Mack told the sad and terrible story of pretty Alice Lepugh's murder.

Caxton Bent turned his face away when the narrator came to the closing episode.

"I hope you will find the man who killed her," he said, in a low voice.

"I will find him," was the fierce response. "I feel it in my bones."

"You've got his description, I suppose."

"Yes, and I'd know him anywhere by the scar under his right ear."

At the words Caxton Bent put up his hand to the part of the face indicated by the other.

The next instant he dropped his hand and burst into a laugh.

"You spoke so fiercely," he explained, "and looked at me so queerly, that for the moment I thought I must have the scar on my face."

"It's lucky you haven't," growled Iron Mack.

"Yes, I think so. But let's change the subject. You were talking about a bank job and Gib Yost."

"Yes, so I was."

"What is Yost's trick?"

"It's nothing more nor less than a pocket safe-borer. All the tools for a first-class job are comprised in this little joker of Yost's, and can be carried in a pocket-handkerchief."

"That's out of sight, sure."

"You bet."

"What are its features?"

"The principal one is a steel loop, shaped like a freight car coupling, but smaller. This hooks over the handle which turns the bolts when the combination leaves them free to be drawn."

"That's great."

"What's to come is greater. Through the upper half of the loop is thrust a steel bar, ending in a block of steel, containing the drill. The sleeve of the drill is a reverse screw, so arranged that when the power to turn the drill is applied a tremendous pressure is exerted on the point."

"I see, I see," exclaimed Caxton Bent, as he rubbed his hands in pleased appreciation.

"The turning crank of the drill," pursued Iron Mack, "is a sectional jimmy, which can be taken off and used for any desired purpose, in forcing doors or other obstacles, for instance. And the best of it is that the entire apparatus can be taken apart and wrapped in a handkerchief."

"How much does it weigh?"

"Not over five pounds."

"Good."

"And with first-class drills—such as I have got, Bent—it is capable of boring a dozen holes in the best of safe-locks in twenty minutes. Superintendent Byrnes, of New York, says it the most dangerous burglar's implement in existence."

The conversation between the two outlaws had carried on in the waiting-room of the depot.

There were no other persons within sight or hearing.

When Iron Mack finished his description of the invention of Gilbert Yost, the man from Georgia rose with great excitement.

"By cracky!" he said, with enthusiasm, "I want to tackle a bank right away."

"There are two at Bellfield, thirty miles distant," replied Iron Mack, quietly.

"Let's try 'em both, then."

"I'm agreeable."

"Yost's method for one, Jesse James' for the other."

"That suits."

"When shall we start?"

"This afternoon. A few days ought to give us time of the land."

They were thoroughly disguised when they took the train for Bellfield.

One of the passengers in the car with them was a heavily-bearded man, of middle age and large, athletic frame, with keen, gray eyes looking out from under bushy eyebrows.

He was regarding Caxton Bent with some interest when a young lady of surpassing beauty—a blonde—came down the aisle and touched him gently on the arm.

"Why, why," he exclaimed, in a joyous tone, "what did you get on?"

"At the last station, a moment ago. Didn't you notice me?"

"What a question, Mona," he said, reproachfully. "I had seen you I would have been at your side in a moment."

"Yes, Perry, I think you would," she returned, with a blush and a smile.

Perry!

At the name, Iron Mack turned in his seat and gave the man with the gray eyes the benefit of a searching scrutiny.

"No, it's not the coward who murdered pretty Alice," he muttered, disappointedly, under his breath, and turning to his newspaper, began to read the criminal record of the preceding day.

The young lady took a seat beside the bearded man.

"Where are you going?" she asked, after they had conversed a while.

"To Bellfield."

"In search of that man you were speaking about last time you called?"

"Yes."

"I am afraid you will never find him, Perry," she said despondingly.

"Why?"

"Because he is as cunning as a weasel and knows how to successfully cover his tracks."

"Am I not cunning myself?" looking at her with a confident smile.

"No, you are shrewd, but not cunning. There's a difference, you know."

"If he goes to Bellfield, I will find him," he said, with assurance.

"I hope you will succeed, of course," she rejoined, with a bright look, "for when you find him, you will be richer by many thousand dollars, and, and——"

"Then I can marry the girl of my choice, eh?"

The young lady blushed and turned her face toward the window.

"I will give you my answer as to that," she said, "when you have caught your man, Mr. Perry Bowdeen."

She spoke in a low tone, but Iron Mack heard her.

Perry Bowdeen! Then the man he was hunting was not ten feet away from him.

A few minutes later the train pulled up at Bellfield.

Four passengers alighted at the little station.

They were Caxton Bent, Iron Mack, Mona Caine, and the man who had been addressed as Perry Bowdeen.

The first move in the strange and exciting game to be played in the thriving Kansas town was made by Iron Mack.

Stepping up to Perry Bowdeen, he said, respectfully:

"I could not help overhearing some of the conversation that took place in the car between you and this young lady here."

The man with gray eyes and heavy beard looked at the speaker suspiciously.

"I have heard of you," Jesse James' representative went on, hurriedly, "and I believe I know why you have come to Bellfield. You are in search of some one."

"What Miss Caine said must have told you that," replied the other, coldly.

"Possibly it did. But to the point. I know where your man is, and I can point him out to you."

"You can?" with a start. "Where is he?"

"Give me a private interview and I will tell you."

Perry Bowdeen hesitated a moment.

Then he said:

"Let's walk up to the end of the platform, but in sight of your friend and Miss Caine, and do our talking there."

"All right."

CHAPTER III.

IRON MACK STRIKES FOR VENGEANCE.

The man who had been addressed by Mona Caine as Perry Bowdeen spoke a few words to her in a low tone of voice, inaudible to Iron Mack, and then walked briskly along the platform of the station until he came to the end.

Jesse James' pal did not leave his new partner, Caxton Bent, without giving him some rapidly whispered instructions.

"Keep your eye on the girl," he said, "and don't let her, or any one else, for that matter, come down and interrupt my conversation with her lover."

"You may depend on me to hold up my end of the string, Mack," replied Bent, with a smile.

Standing on a sidetrack, opposite the end of the platform, was an empty boxcar.

The door was partly open, and when Iron Mack saw it, a look of fierce pleasure came into his eyes.

"Let's go in there," he suggested, pointing at the door.

Perry Bowdeen stared hard at the outlaw.

"Go in there!" he repeated, in cold surprise. "For what reason? Can't we talk here without being observed? Besides, we have so little to say that it would be hardly worth while to seek a more retired or comfortable spot than this."

"Do you know much about this man whom you are seeking?" asked Iron Mack, gravely.

"I require enlightenment on some points, I will admit. But——"

The outlaw interrupted him by a quick wave of the hand.

"It is on these points, as well as on the matter of his present whereabouts, that I desire to speak with you," he said, "and the story, I assure you, is not a short one."

Perry Bowdeen looked from Iron Mack to the station building, in front of which his sweetheart, Mona Caine, and Caxton Bent were still standing, the one looking down the platform in their direction, the other staring at a large advertisement poster tacked up on one side of the ticket window.

"How long will it take you, do you think, to tell me what you know about Caxton Bent?"

Iron Mack started violently.

He was quite unprepared for the announcement that the man Perry Bowdeen was seeking was the nephew of Ruben Burrows, the noted Southern outlaw.

In assuming to know something important concerning Bowdeen's quarry, Mack had but made a bold and daring move for the purpose of enlisting Bowdeen's attention and drawing him to some convenient spot where he might quickly and successfully carry out the murderous promise he had made to Jesse James.

He had not the slightest idea as to the identity of the man Bowdeen was seeking when he spoke to the latter on their arrival at Bellfield.

Mona Caine's lover did not notice Iron Mack's start of surprise, for as soon as he had spoken Caxton Bent's name, he turned his eyes toward the ticket-office.

The young lady was a strong attraction to the man

the gray eyes and heavy beard, and, considering her beauty and fascinating ways, it was small wonder that Bowdeen turned frequently to gaze at her.

Just now she was engaged in a singular occupation.

She was beckoning to him vigorously, and at the same time emphasizing her desire to have him come to her by nodding her head and compressing her pretty lips.

Bowdeen laughingly shook his head, and then gave his attention to Iron Mack, who had quickly recovered his composure, and was now speaking.

"Fifteen minutes, perhaps ten, if I am not interrupted too many times, will give ample time for the story," he said.

"And you prefer the boxcar for the telling of it?"

"Yes."

Perry Bowdeen gave Iron Mack a singular look.

The outlaw interpreted it to mean that he himself might turn out to be Caxton Bent, or one nearly related or intimately associated with that personage.

To make sure on this point, he said, quickly:

"Have you ever seen Bent?"

"No."

"But you have his description, doubtless."

"It is not worth much, for I have been told that he is a man of many disguises."

Iron Mack breathed easier.

If he could get Perry Bowdeen into the boxcar, all would go well with his wicked plan.

But before he executed it he made up his mind to find out why Bowdeen was pursuing Rube Burrows' nephew.

Mack knew little concerning Bent, and it was therefore to his interest to ascertain all that could be learned concerning him before they entered upon their important bank work at Bellfield.

"I will do as you suggest," said Bowdeen, finally, "though I don't see the necessity of it."

Mona Caine, twenty paces away, turned pale when she saw her lover follow Iron Mack into the boxcar.

She was about to walk down the platform and interrupt the conversation between Bowdeen and the handsome, but evil-eyed man, whom she distrusted, when Caxton Bent stepped in front of her, with an expression of earnest remonstrance on his face.

"I wouldn't go down there, if I were you," he said, respectfully and earnestly, "for, I assure you, that what they have to say to each other is of the utmost importance and cannot be delayed."

Mona Caine looked at the train robber coldly.

"I must be my own judge in this matter," she said, and would have gone forward had not Bent laid his hand on her arm.

"How dare you!" she indignantly exclaimed, as she drew back quickly and regarded him with flashing eyes.

"I dare anything when a man's life is at stake," he calmly returned.

Her face suddenly changed color.

"A man's life," she faltered. "You don't mean that Caxton Bent—"

She got no further, for the nephew of Rube Burrows became in an instant paler than the fair speaker.

There was a moment's pause.

Then Mona Caine said, as her mind intuitively grasped the truth:

"I see. You yourself are the man Perry Bowdeen seeking."

"No, no," he hastily replied. "You are mistaken."

"I am not mistaken," she replied, with bold confidence. "You are Caxton Bent. 'Perry,' she called out at top of her voice, 'come here, quick. I have found you man for you.'"

At that instant a heavy fall was heard within the boxcar.

While the fair girl stood gazing toward the spot with a look of alarm in her beautiful eyes, Iron Mack leapt out of the door, and, after beckoning to Caxton Bent, sprang across the track and ran down a hill that led to a dense clump of bushes.

Bent understood in a moment what had taken place, and, without a further glance at Miss Caine, ran swiftly down the platform followed in the wake of his criminal associate.

He was half-way down the hill when Mona Caine reached the door of the boxcar.

Looking in, she saw a sight that caused a cry of grief and terror to burst involuntarily from her lips.

Upon the floor of the car Perry Bowdeen lay motionless, in a pool of blood.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BORDER CYCLONE.

Iron Mack's conversation with Perry Bowdeen was short.

On entering the car, he said:

"Before I begin my story, which will end with the statement of Caxton Bent's present whereabouts, I desire to know what your grievance against him is."

"I supposed you knew when you accosted me in reference to him," replied Bowdeen, in some surprise.

"I knew you were looking for him, but I did not know the nature of his latest offense."

Bowdeen looked at his disbelief at these words.

"You do not believe me, I see," said Iron Mack quietly.

"No, I do not."

"And you will therefore refuse to answer any questions?"

"I shall refuse to say anything concerning my business until I have heard your story, and know where the man is."

Bowdeen spoke with a firmness that was not to be shaken.

"Then," said Iron Mack, quickly, "I will begin my part of the play by pointing out to you the man you are so anxious to behold. There is Caxton Bent now."

He pointed toward the door.

Taken off his guard, Perry Bowdeen, usually one of the most cautious of men, turned suddenly and looked toward the station platform.

As he did so, a knife flashed in the air and the next instant the sharp blade was buried in the breast of Mona Caine's lover.

As he fell to the floor of the car, the assassin flung the knife in a corner, and then, leaping to the platform, beckoned to Caxton Bent and disappeared.

"We'll have to make another change in our disguises," panted Bent, when he had come up to his villainous com-

rade in the bushes, "if we expect to go on with the Bellfield job."

"Well, we're fixed to do it, ain't we?" grunted Iron Mack, as he increased his pace. "Wait till we get to that bend yonder, where the river cuts into the bank and makes a deep cove, and we'll do the trick in great shape."

An hour later, as two dirty-faced and ragged-whiskered tramps were entering the little town of Bellfield, they met the constable of the place and a posse of citizens, all armed, and with their faces covered with dust and perspiration.

The taller of the tramps ventured this question, as he came up to the constable:

"Who yer been lookin' fer, cully?"

"Two murderers," grunted the officer, with scarcely a glance at his interlocutor.

"Bet a cartwheel I seen 'em."

"Where?"

The constable was all excitement in an instant.

"Down in ther bush by the river. I was snoozin'—me'n my pard, I means—and ther two blokes waked me up by runnin' plumb ag'in me.

"'It's lucky you ain't a cop,' says one of 'em, when I riz up from me elegant couch of leaves, 'er you might get a head put on ter yer.' With that he skips off."

"Describe them," said the constable, eagerly.

The tramp gave a correct description of Iron Mack and Caxton Bent as they appeared at the railway station.

"They're the coons," cried one of the posse, "sure as guns."

"Yes," said the leader, "the description fits 'em to a dot."

And the next moment the troop of man-hunters were running at the top of their speed for the bushes.

When they had passed out of sight, the tall tramp said to his companion, with a chuckle:

"They'll not show up in town for a couple of hours, Bent."

"And then they'll try to find us," returned the nephew of Rube Burrows, gloomily.

"No, they won't, for their failure to come upon the parties we described won't necessarily cause them to believe that we have deceived them."

"But it may. Anyhow, they'll want to see us again. That's natural."

"Then they won't have the opportunity. Another change of disguise must come into play with us."

"Now you talk."

The third change in their personal appearance was effected in a deserted barn, standing in a large lot thickly grown with trees.

When they emerged into the road, Mack looked like a natty commercial traveler in his light spring suit and small crush hat, while Caxton Bent might have been taken for a respectable farm laborer.

They did not proceed together into Bellfield.

Iron Mack went ahead, and, after securing a room at a second-class lodging-house, located in the second story of a shabby wooden building, went into the saloon, which occupied the ground floor, and there found his new partner awaiting him.

In one corner was a small place partitioned off from the barroom, like the stall of a restaurant, a dirty cretonne portiere doing service at the doorway.

Inside were a table and several chairs.

After they had seated themselves, Iron Mack nearest the door, so that he could keep one eye on the barroom, they called for the drinks.

When they had been served, and the barkeeper had taken tray and glasses away, Jesse James' representative came to the conclusion to ask his companion a few pertinent questions.

"Bent," said he, with an earnestness which did not fail to impress the nephew of Rube Burrows, "the man I did up at the railway station was looking for you."

"I know it."

"Yes?" in surprise. "Who told you?"

"The girl."

"What did she say?"

"Merely mentioned the fact that her lover was on my trail."

"Did she know you were Caxton Bent?"

"No, of course not."

Iron Mack paused a moment.

Then he said, with grave insistence:

"I want you to tell me why Perry Bowdeen was hunting you."

Caxton Bent's eyes fell before his companion's searching gaze.

"It's purely a private matter," he said, evasively.

"It can't be," returned Iron Mack, sternly, "for I am convinced that this Perry Bowdeen was a detective."

"So he was," replied Bent, with apparent unconcern.

"You seem to take matters very coolly."

"Why shouldn't I? I am not afraid of anything that walks. Besides, Perry Bowdeen is dead."

"But his sweetheart, Mona Caine, I think he called her, lives, and she evidently knows all about you, and will, perhaps, hire another detective to hunt you down and avenge the man whom she doubtless believes was killed on your account."

Caxton Bent lit a cigar, with an unmoved face, and, after taking several puffs, informed his new partner that, after he had one interview with the girl, she would at once cease all efforts to have him arrested.

Here was a puzzle for Iron Mack, and there was a frown on his face as he rejoined:

"I asked you a moment ago to tell me what you had done to cause Perry Bowdeen to hunt you. Your reply that the matter was a private one did not satisfy me, and your recent remark regarding Bowdeen's sweetheart, intimating that you have some strong pull on her, makes me suspect that the privacy you talk about comes mighty near being publicity in certain sections."

"What sections?" cried Caxton Bent, in some heat.

"Sections where you and Miss Caine are well acquainted, and where Perry Bowdeen lived or had business relations," returned Iron Mack, quietly.

The nephew of Rube Burrows threw his cigar away, and arose, nervously, to his feet.

"If you are not satisfied to take me as I am," he said, with real or assumed anger, "to let my past affairs alone, as matters that affect me, and me only, then we had better dissolve partnership at once, and each go his separate way."

"Sit down," returned Mack, harshly, "and don't make a blamed fool of yourself."

"If you'll promise to let my past life alone, I'll sit down," Bent responded, in a grumbling voice.

"I promise never to refer to the subject again, unless I find that it concerns me directly."

"How can it?"

Iron Mack shrugged his shoulders.

Bent resumed his seat, and then more whisky was ordered.

It was not long before the good fellowship was restored, though Mack had secretly made up his mind to know the relationship existing between Miss Caine and Rube Burrows' nephew, as well as the cause of Perry Bowdeen's pursuit of Bent, before his association with the latter came to an end.

That night they made a careful inspection of the exterior of the bank they intended to operate on, Gib Yost fashion.

It occupied a small one-story wooden building on a corner.

Back of it was a yard used for the storage of large agricultural implements by a firm doing business further down the street.

Iron Mack came to the conclusion that it would be a comparatively easy matter to effect an entrance into the yard.

Bent thought the iron shutters would prove a hindrance.

"Wait till you see me at work with Yost's apparatus, and you'll see that door open inside of five minutes," was the confident answer of Jesse James' representative.

The other bank was in another street, and occupied the lower storeroom of a brick building in the middle of the block.

Here they resolved to try Jesse James' tactics, though the venture promised to be a dangerous one.

When they retired to rest in the room Iron Mack had hired, Bent's face wore such a satisfied expression that his companion asked, in some curiosity, what he was thinking about.

"You," was the unexpected reply.

"Me? Oh, come now, you're giving me a fill."

"Not I. Half an hour ago I heard something downstairs in the saloon."

"While I was away?"

"Yes, while you were out interviewing the constable."

"What did you hear?"

"A farmer came into the saloon and said that the man who laid Perry Bowdeen out was a chain-lightning operator he used to know over in Colorado, or else the description was a misfit."

"Well?" said Iron Mack, in strong excitement. "What else did he say?"

"He mentioned your name. Said he: 'The murderer is Corey Mack, and if the constable catches him he'll be a smarter man than I take him for. Why,' he went on, with an emphasis that would have done you proud to hear, 'that galoot is the rip-roaringest jack-swagger and bang-and-slasher in nineteen counties. He's a holy terror, and he's got the cunning of the devil. Where I lived they feared him worse'n tornadoes and the grass-noppers, and the name they gave him was one that he had earned by his dare-devil deeds of lawlessness.'"

Caxton Bent paused and gazed at his companion with admiring eyes.

"I had heard the name before, but I never knew until to-day that the owner of it was Iron Mack."

The cheek of the bold representative of Jesse James flushed with pleasure.

"Maybe the name's an insignificant one," he said, with affected indifference.

"No, it isn't. It fits you like a dot. Mack, I'm proud to be the partner of the Border Cyclone."

CHAPTER V.

IRON MACK ON THE RAMPAGE.

Iron Mack seized the opportunity offered to say quickly:

"If you trust me, tell me what you refused to tell me a short time ago—all you know about Perry Bowdeen, and all he knows about you."

Caxton Bent pressed his lips, and bent his eyes to the floor.

Suddenly he looked up and said, with decision:

"I will."

"Good. Now you talk to suit me."

"Bowdeen was hunting me to obtain a reward," he began.

"You had committed a robbery, or something of the sort, then?"

"Yes."

"A private affair."

Iron Mack said this with a smile that was half malicious.

Bent answered, with a serious face:

"Yes. The facts are these: I stood up a man one night in Macon, Georgia, and relieved him of twenty thousand dollars in notes. My victim was an old codger, and he was the father of Mona Caine."

"Ah!"

"That's where the private part comes in; see?"

"In a measure. Go on."

"I did not know Miss Caine, and she had never clapped eyes on me. But the old man knew me, and he called out my name loud enough for a policeman to hear when I was transferring the notes to my pocket."

"The next morning he fell in an apoplectic fit, and I read in the papers the next day that he died several hours afterward without having recovered consciousness."

"I got away with the boodle easy enough, but I knew it would be bad policy for me to remain in the South after the robbery, for the Government offered a big reward for my head; and, before two days had passed, I learned that Perry Bowdeen, a detective, and Mona Caine's lover, had registered a solemn oath to obtain the reward, and punish me, or have me punished, for the death of old man Caine."

Bent lighted a fresh cigar, and then proceeded:

"You are probably wondering what my hold on Mona Caine is, for I remarked a short time ago that I would have no fear of prosecution for my offense if I could once procure an interview with her."

"Yes, yes," said Iron Mack, quickly.

"My hold consists of this: I am her half-brother."

"What!"

"Surprises you, eh?" said Caxton Bent, coolly.

"It does, for a fact."

"It will surprise her when she hears of it. You see, my mother was never married to Caine, and I was born a year before he led Mona's mother to the altar. Rube Burrows' people brought me up, and I did not know whose child I was until I reached the age of manhood."

"But why did you rob your father? Wouldn't he have given you money of his own accord?"

"No," wrathfully. "He was an old skinflint, and Macon was a big winner when he turned up his toes. I had no affection for him, and when he offered me five hundred dollars the only time I called on him, and said that would have to suffice, and that his daughter was the heiress to all his money, I made up my mind to get my share by force. And I did," concluded Caxton Bent, grimly.

"Had Perry Bowdeen no private grudge against you?" queried Iron Mack, who felt that his companion had not told him all he knew.

"Well, yes," was the slow reply. "He was down on me for a trick played on him once. But that is another matter."

"Was the trick played when he was a detective, or while he was a member of Jesse James' band?"

"I never knew him when he was one of Jesse's men."

"Where did you know him? In Macon?"

"No; in jail."

Iron Mack had been surprised so many times before at statements made by the nephew of Rube Burrows that he was now ready to hear the most astonishing tale with an unruffled countenance.

"What was he in jail for?" he asked, quietly.

"He came to see me."

"Oh, he was not a prisoner, then?"

"No. He was the sheriff's principal deputy."

"Well, what was the trick that you played on him?"

"I knocked him down, bound and gagged him, with cords and so forth, taken from his own pockets, and then made my escape from jail in his clothes. It was after dark, and I had to pass but one weak-eyed trusty and the jailer's pretty daughter. The latter suspected the trick, but she liked me, and said nothing."

"You must have hurt Bowdeen pretty badly?"

"It was a month before he was able to get about."

Conversation languished after this, and it was not long before the partners were in bed and snoring lustily.

In the morning an unwelcome surprise awaited them.

After taking a few cocktails in the saloon, they sat down at the rear to look at the morning papers.

In the *Bellfield Leader* appeared a long article relating to the movements of the constable and his posse, and the failure thus far to find any clew as to the whereabouts of the escaped criminals.

It wound up with the statement that Perry Bowdeen, the detective, was not dead.

He had been removed from the car in an unconscious state, and it was the opinion of the physician in charge of the case that he might recover.

The news affected Iron Mack to such an extent that he immediately proceeded to drink glass after glass of the strongest liquors the saloon afforded.

Caxton Bent was more moderate in his desires, and he

tried several times to induce his partner to come away from the bar.

But each attempt was met with a rough refusal.

"I'll know when I've got enough," he would say, "and as I am willing to bet my head against a hickorynut that I can outdrink any man that ever planked his hoof down in Kansas territory, there isn't much danger of my making a fool of myself."

"All right, then. I was only speaking for your own good."

"I understand. Say, why in the blue blazes don't you buy a jag on account of this ill news?"

"I want a clear head just now," was the quiet reply.

"What for?"

"So that I may concoct a scheme that will make Perry Bowdeen dead for sure."

"That's business."

Iron Mack gave his companion a hearty slap on the back.

Their conversation was not overheard, for the bar-keeper, after placing a large bottle before the outlaw, had gone out into the yard to feed a chained bulldog, which had been howling lugubriously for some time.

"I'll kill him before he is able to leave his bed," continued Caxton Bent, with fierce decision.

"We'll do the job together."

"I've no objection to that."

Half an hour later Iron Mack staggered out of the saloon, followed by Bent.

"We've got all day before us," said Jesse James' representative, in an unsteady voice. "What do you say to a horseback ride in the country?"

"The very thing."

Rube Burrows' nephew went to a livery stable, procured saddle horses, and the pair were soon galloping down the road in the direction of Flint's Bottom, a village ten miles away.

On the outskirts they encountered a lone pedestrian.

Bent recognized him as the farmer who had referred to Iron Mack's Colorado record the previous afternoon.

"That's the fellow," he whispered to his companion, whose head was nodding from his potations, "who says he used to know you as the Border Cyclone."

Iron Mack straightened up in his saddle and gave the farmer a searching glance.

"He never knew me but once in his life," he whispered back, "and that was one day when I rode into Pueblo and made things howl. I remember that I persuaded him to stand on his head at the bank corner and yell 'rats' at the top of his voice."

"Do you think he recognizes you in your present make-up?"

"No. But I'll stop and have a little fun with him to make sure."

Reining up his animal in front of the farmer, Iron Mack called out in a high, shrill voice, more like a woman's than a man's:

"Say, old beeswax, what's the time of the day with you?"

The farmer frowned at this rude familiarity, but his looks showed that he had no suspicion that the questioner was the dreaded Colorado outlaw of days gone by.

"It's about noon," he said, gruffly, and then turned his

head away from the pair and would have continued on his journey, but for the stern command in a different voice:

"Trot out that chronometer of yours and pass it up here, and be quick about it."

The farmer gave a sudden start, and then stopped.

His face was pale and his lips were trembling as he hastened to comply with Iron Mack's order.

Looking at him intently out of his bloodshot eyes, the outlaw came to the quick and correct conclusion that the former knew who he was.

He had spoken the last time in his natural voice, and the farmer had remembered it.

As the watch, a heavy gold, hunting-case affair, was handed to Mack, he bent forward so that his evil face was within a few inches of the farmer's frightened one, and hissed out these words:

"Seen me before, eh?"

"No, no," stammered the man, as he backed away, "I never saw you before to-day."

"Think a moment. Were you ever in Colorado?"

"Yes—yes."

"In Pueblo?"

"I was there a short time, but——"

"You never saw me there, is that it?"

"Yes."

"You lie!"

Out flashed a revolver, and as the muzzle came on a line with the farmer's face, he put up his hands and cried out, faintly:

"I might have seen you there."

Iron Mack uttered a harsh laugh.

"What shall we do with this coon?" he asked of Caxton Bent.

"We've got to do something, or he'll give you away."

"I think I'll make a corpse out of him," exclaimed Iron Mack, vindictively.

The farmer shuddered and looked down the road in the direction of the village, in the hope that he might see a friendly form.

But the road, as far as the eye could reach, was deserted.

The business part of the Bottom could not be seen, for the reason that it was around a bend in the road, about a quarter of a mile away.

Iron Mack dismounted from his horse and gave the bridle into the hands of his partner.

At that moment the clatter of a horse's hoofs was heard coming up the road.

Caxton Bent, who was the first to look up, uttered an exclamation of savage delight.

For the newcomer was Mona Caine.

CHAPTER VI.

A VILLAGE TERRORIZED.

"Now for my interview," said Caxton Bent, as Mona Caine came galloping up.

She was opposite to him—he was still on horseback—and would have passed had he not caught her horse by the bridle and brought the animal to a standstill.

"Have no fears," he said, in his politest manner, "for I mean you no harm."

She did not recognize him, for he spoke in a disguised voice.

"What do you want?" was her very natural question.

"To have five minutes' conversation with you."

"On what subject?"

"The robbery of your father."

"What! do you know about it?" she eagerly interrogated, her fears vanishing before her curiosity.

"Let's ride on a few rods, and I will tell you."

"Very well."

They walked their horses out of hearing distance, and Caxton Bent had told her the story which informed him that he was her half-brother, when several pistol shots followed by shrieks and groans, were heard from the spot where they had left Iron Mack and the farmer.

The half-drunken outlaw had shot the farmer down in cold blood, as the best way of silencing his mouth.

Mona Caine looked back in time to see the victim of Iron Mack's ferocity fall to the ground.

"Your companion is a murderer," she said, with a glance full of horror, "and I now believe that he is the man who stabbed Mr. Bowdeen."

"But you won't molest him if he is," he quietly returned, "because he is a friend of mine."

"I will spare you," she replied, firmly, "wretch though you have proven yourself to be; but that man behind us shall suffer punishment for what he has done."

She put spurs to her horse as she spoke, and was several rods away before Caxton Bent could make a move to detain her.

"Stop!" he shouted, menacingly, as he galloped after her, "or it will be the worse for you."

A mocking laugh was the answer.

Mona Caine rode the fleetest animal of the two, and when he became aware of this fact, Rube Burrows' nephew gave vent to a savage imprecation:

"Curse her!" he muttered, "she must not escape, for she'll knock our bank scheme into a cocked hat by sending the officers after Mack."

Without an instant's hesitation he whipped out a revolver and fired three times in quick succession.

The result of his marksmanship was seen when Mona's horse fell in the roadway, wounded unto death.

Its fair rider escaped without injury, and she was standing by the body of the bleeding animal, with eyes that flashed hate and contempt, when Caxton Bent pulled up beside her.

"You coward! You brute!" she exclaimed, in hot indignation. "May I ask what you expect to gain by such dastardly conduct?"

"Your silence for what my friend has done," he quickly replied.

She shut her lips tightly and turned her head away.

"You will please consider yourself my prisoner for the next twenty-four hours," he continued.

"Touch me if you dare!"

Her lovely face, crimsoned with righteous wrath, looked fearlessly up into his.

The outlaw laughed lightly at her defiance.

But when she sprang from the road and made for the fence which inclosed a field of grain belonging to a farmer, a portion of whose house could be seen about three hundred yards away, his face took on a serious expression, and he rode toward her furiously.

The fence was of pickets and high, and she was frantically endeavoring to tear one of the pickets loose, when Bent leaped from his saddle and caught her by the arm.

As he held her tightly, Iron Mack rode up. "Take her over to the house," he said, in a thick voice, and with a drunken leer, "and give her the best room in it."

Caxton Bent could not tell by the expression of his partner's face whether he was joking or in earnest.

While he stared at Mack blankly, the latter went on: "Come up where I did my work, and I'll show you how to get to the house without breaking down a fence."

He turned his horse's head and rode back to the scene of the murder.

Caxton Bent was about to use force to induce his half-sister to accompany him, when Mona surprised him by saying, quietly:

"You won't have to drag me up there; I will go peaceably."

"To the house, also?"

"Yes."

Not quite understanding the situation, Bent led his horse to the spot where Mack was awaiting him, Miss Caine walking gravely by his side.

When they got to the scene of the tragedy the body of the murdered farmer was nowhere to be seen.

Iron Mack noted the look of surprise on Bent's face and laughed.

"He's there," pointing to a shallow excavation, where a tree had been uprooted, "and I have covered him over with leaves and twigs. Won't be discovered for days, unless some one stumbles in."

Mona Caine shivered.

Her loathing and dread of Jesse James' conscienceless friend caused her to walk rapidly away from him to a gate in the fence, a few feet away.

"I will go to the house of my own accord," she said, without looking at Iron Mack.

"That's the way to converse, my beauty. Trot on ahead, then, and we'll follow with our horses."

Mona Caine kept a few rods in advance of the outlaws as the way to the house was taken.

"Did you notice the name on the gate when I opened it?" asked Iron Mack, when they were half way to their destination.

"Yes—'Paul Arnway.'"

"Same name on this envelope, isn't it?" holding up the article in front of Bent's eyes.

"Yes. Where did you get it?"

"On the body of the farmer back there."

Bent's countenance, which, ever since they had left the road, had worn an uncomfortable expression, instantly changed when his partner answered his last question.

"Ah, I see," he said, in a tone of mingled relief and pleasure, "why you suggested that I should take the girl to the house."

"Great scheme, isn't it?" chuckled Iron Mack. "House belongs to a farmer who is dead. No one here but the housekeeper."

"How do you know that?" looking at Jesse James' representative admiringly.

"Found it out from the letter in the envelope. See?"

"Yes."

They were now in sight of the house, a small one-story building, with a wide veranda in front.

On the veranda sat a middle-aged, homely-faced woman in a rocking-chair, knitting.

Mona uttered a cry of delight when her eyes fell upon the woman's face.

Iron Mack chuckled.

Caxton Bent showed surprise and vexation.

"You see now," whispered the former, "why Miss Caine was so willing to go to the house."

"Because she knows the housekeeper?"

"Yes."

"That would be a poor reason, for if she knows the housekeeper she must know the farmer, and the fact of his death at your hands would have dissuaded her from going to the house."

"You presume too much, Benty, my boy," returned Mack, with a grin, "I know she had no acquaintance with the farmer when she passed us, for she gave him one glance and neither spoke nor bowed. He was a stranger to her. But she knows the old woman there"—the two were conversing like old friends on the veranda—"and that goes to show that she met her somewhere else."

"What's your programme?"

"To shut the girl up here until we get through with our work in this part of the State."

"We'll have to shut up the old woman, too."

"I expect."

They were close to the veranda.

Anticipating no warlike demonstration on the part of Farmer Arnway's housekeeper, the two outlaws were almost stupefied with amazement when the woman rose up suddenly and pointed a pistol at Iron Mack's head.

"I am Miss Caine's friend," she said, in a quick, firm tone, "and this is my property. The man who steps upon this veranda gets a bullet in his skull."

"Your property!" gasped Mack. "Where, then, does the farmer get off?"

"Mr. Arnway?"

"Yes."

"He has not been the owner for several days. I bought the place of him last Saturday."

There was a pause.

"Are you alone here?" Caxton Bent asked.

"That's none of your business."

"Which means that you are," cried Iron Mack, in savage glee. "And now to open the campaign. Take that."

He flung his pistol at her head.

The movement distracted her aim, and the bullet meant for the reckless outlaw's heart whizzed harmlessly by his head.

Iron Mack saw her fall, and, leaping from his saddle, flung himself upon her, leaving his partner to look out for Mona Caine.

The latter was borne struggling into the house.

Jesse James' remorseless representative came in while Caxton Bent was tying Mona's wrists.

"The vixen outside won't bother us any more," he said, grimly.

"Has she croaked?"

"Yes."

Mona Caine burst into tears.

"You needn't cry," remarked Iron Mack, in what was

meant to be a soothing voice, though it was as hoarse as a crow's, "for I didn't mean to kill her. The sharp end of the pistol struck her behind the ear and did the business. I only desired to stun her."

"You will be hanged for this," she said slowly, as her weeping suddenly ceased.

"Wrong," replied Iron Mack, coolly.

"I say you will."

"I say I won't. And I ought to know, for if I am ever stretched it will be for something else."

Mona, now angry with herself for having spoken to him at all, bit her lips and looked sorrowfully at the wall.

She was taken to the dead woman's bedroom, and Iron Mack, who was an expert at rope-tying, fastened her securely to one of the posts of the heavy oaken bedstead.

The poor girl could not have cried out in her distress, had she been so minded, for the brute had gagged as well as bound her.

After assuring themselves that there was no one about the premises, the partners in crime disposed of the body of the faithful housekeeper by dumping it into an old well back of the barn, and then mounting their horses, rode rapidly back to the road.

"How do you feel?" asked Iron Mack, with a sharp look at his companion, whose face was sober, and whose brows were wrinkled.

"As though I wanted to lick somebody," was the snappish answer. "Let's ride into Flint's Bottom and paralyze the inhabitants."

"Are you in earnest?"

"Try me and see."

"Want to imitate the deeds of Jesse James?"

"No"—with an oath—"I want to show myself worthy the friendship of the Border Cyclone."

"Then come on."

The two reckless outlaws put spurs to their horses and rode like the wind into the peaceable village.

Down the main street they galloped, discharging their pistols right and left, and causing the terror-stricken inhabitants who were out of doors to fly to shelter.

At the first saloon they stopped and made the frightened proprietor bring them out two bottles of whisky.

Iron Mack took one and Caxton Bent the other, and after they had each drank long and deeply, Iron Mack called out hoarsely for the liquor dispenser to stand aside.

He lost no time in doing so, and then, to his consternation, they forced their animals to enter the saloon.

Three men were playing pin pool at a billiard table at the rear end of the room.

Dismounting from his horse, Iron Mack seized a cue, and, advancing to the table, announced his intention of playing, single-handed, against the trio.

But each of the three shrank back into a corner and refused to play.

"Get up here," yelled the drunken desperado, "and give the balls a shake in the box. I'm talking, do you mind, and what I say goes."

As he spoke, he deliberately reloaded his revolvers, and then, as neither of the three pool players moved, he fired recklessly in their direction.

The bullet cut a lock off the temple of the middle man.

With a yell of affright, he snatched up his cue and sprang to the table.

"I'll play! I'll play!" he gasped, "only don't s again."

"Come up here, you two," ordered Iron Mack, with bestowing a look on the man who had weakened, "or—

Before he could finish the sentence the men were at table.

They were farm laborers, and large, able-bodied men; either of them, apparently, was more than a match physically, for the fierce-eyed outlaw who opposed them.

And yet they were so cowed by his manner that one of them had the least idea of forcibly resisting outrageous demands.

As they stood leaning tremblingly on their cues, waiting for the next demonstration, four men entered saloon and walked up to the counter.

Iron Mack saw them, and turning to Caxton Bent, said hoarsely:

"Here, partner, you keep an eye on these players while I monkey with that quartette yonder."

"All right."

With a wild yell, Mack charged on the new-comers, two of whom were business men of the place.

Pointing to the wall on the other side of the room from the counter, he shouted:

"Over there, quick, the whole four of you."

Drawing a bead on them with his revolver, he saw them obey his commands.

"Now line up, and don't huddle."

The four men "lined up."

"Eyes front!" yelled the desperado, and each man gazed at Iron Mack appealingly.

Just then there came an unexpected diversion.

A tall, heavily built man appeared in the doorway.

He was dressed like a hunter and in his hand was a rifle.

Taking in the situation at a glance, he raised his rifle and fired.

Iron Mack, whose eyes were on the quartette in front of him, knew nothing of the stranger's appearance, and his death would have assuredly occurred then and there if Caxton Bent had not uttered a warning cry just as the man with the rifle was about to press the trigger.

Iron Mack ducked his head and the bullet passed harmlessly over it.

Before the rifle could speak a second time, the nephew of Rube Burrows had sent a bullet from his pistol into the stranger's heart.

The latter fell across the doorway and did not move.

One look at the result of his work and Caxton Bent threw his hat on the floor and uttered a whoop that was heard blocks away.

He had been holding the bridle of Iron Mack's horse, but upon the fall of the rifleman, he dropped his hands.

The whoop caused the horse to rear and plunge with affright.

Iron Mack, standing back of the animal, was made aware of its movements when a plunge came that sent him sprawling to the floor.

The moment their ferocious enemy fell, the four men lined up against the wall recovered courage.

Simultaneously they sprang forward and threw themselves upon the prostrate Cyclone.

CHAPTER VII.

CAXTON BENT'S DECEPTION.

If the four citizens of Flint's Bottom expected an easy victory over the man on the floor, they were soon made to feel that they had erred seriously in their calculations.

Iron Mack had not been injured by the fall, and when he saw the quartette move toward him with the intention of taking him at a disadvantage, he acted with bold decision.

Lying on the flat of his back, he began firing shot after shot without taking the trouble to note whether the bullets took effect or not; and it was only when the last cartridge in his revolver had been exploded that he arose to a sitting position and looked about him.

Two of the men lay dead on the floor, one was on his knees with a wounded leg, while the fourth had returned to his position against the wall and now had his hands raised high in air, and a most terrified look on his face.

Iron Mack's horse had got over its fright, and its bridle was again in Caxton Bent's hand.

"Want any help?" called out Rube Burrows' nephew, when the shooting had come to an end.

"No," returned Iron Mack, grimly, as he reloaded his revolver. "I can manage my end of the string alone."

Rising to his feet, he looked about for the barkeeper. That individual had disappeared.

The Border Cyclone found him cowering behind the bar.

"Fill up that bottle, you cur?" thundered Iron Mack, "and be sure to put the best whisky you've got in it."

"Ye—es, sir."

Having executed the order, the barkeeper handed the bottle to the reckless outlaw.

"Take a drink yourself, first."

"Why—why——" stuttered the surprised man, "I don't——"

"Yes, you do. Take a big swig, quick, or I'll perforate your liver. The whisky may be poisoned, and I want to try it on you first."

The barkeeper took the bottle and drank a few swallows.

Iron Mack watched him intently.

"That's all right," he remarked, after a few moments, "and now for a drink myself."

Having satisfied his immediate cravings, he put the bottle in his pocket, and was about to walk over to the billiard-table, when he noticed that there was a large group of people at the door.

They were citizens of the Bottoms, who had been attracted to the saloon by the shooting.

"Come in," yelled Iron Mack, "and take a drink with me."

No one entered.

The request was repeated.

"Thank you," said a boy at the outskirts of the crowd, "but when we drink we choose our own time."

"Give 'em a rattle!" Caxton Bent roared out, and his own pistol cracked as he spoke.

No damage was done, but the crowd scattered immediately.

Iron Mack looked about the saloon for a moment, then mounted his horse and rode out, followed by his partner.

They reached the street to see but two persons.

These were a young man who was walking along the sidewalk with his girl.

They were approaching the saloon, and were paying no attention to the wild-looking men in their front.

A shout from Caxton Bent made them look up in alarm.

"Bring that heifer over here," he commanded, with a flourish of his revolver, "before I take a shot at your ear."

The young man, who was a country dude, shrank back against the fence, near which he had been walking, but the girl, who was small, black-eyed and well-formed, stepped forward promptly.

"What do you want?" she asked, fearlessly.

"A kiss, my pretty one."

The girl's eyes flashed with anger.

"Coward!" she muttered, but loud enough for Bent to hear.

With a savage imprecation, he sprang from his saddle and approached her.

When within a yard of her, out came a little pocket pistol—a derringer—and Caxton Bent, looking down the barrel, read instant death printed at the end in large letters.

He started and put his hand backward.

"Don't," said the girl, quickly, but coolly.

Caxton Bent allowed his hand to fall to his side.

Iron Mack, looking on at the spectacle, burst into a jeering laugh.

"Ain't she spunky," he said, with a series of winks at the courageous girl. "Ought to belong to us instead of being against us."

The girl, without taking her eyes from Caxton Bent's face, ordered him to remount his horse and ride on.

"Better mind her, old boy," advised the Border Cyclone, with a chuckle, "for she means business, you bet."

"Why don't you send an ounce of lead into her?" growled Rube Burrows' nephew. "You can help me out of this if you have a mind to."

"I don't want to help you out. The girl's a daisy. But if I were in your place I'd get that kiss."

"You would, eh?"

"Yes."

"Then take my place."

With these words, Caxton Bent remounted his animal. Iron Mack was on the ground the next moment.

The girl turned the muzzle of her derringer in his direction and warned him not to come nearer, or she would fire.

Iron Mack, with a smile on his face, advanced.

Her face paled slightly at the reckless daring of the desperado.

He was within reaching distance, and one hand was outstretched to take her by the arm, when the derringer cracked.

But the bullet meant to reach his heart became flattened against a coat of mail.

Iron Mack knew what he was about when he agreed to take Caxton Bent's place.

The girl was in his arms in another instant.

He kissed her once, twice, thrice, and then rudely flung her from him.

Remounting his horse he said, harshly, to Bent:

"That's the first action I've done to-day that I am ashamed of."

The girl, crouching upon the sidewalk, with her face buried in her hands, was sobbing bitterly.

She looked up as the outlaws were about to ride away. "I shall meet you again some day," she said, slowly, to Iron Mack, "and then I may be able to pay you back for this insult."

The abashed outlaw did not answer her, but rode furiously away, followed by his partner.

When they had gone, the girl, declining the further escort of the young man who had displayed the white feather, walked rapidly down the street with bent head, nor stopped until she came to the gate which had the name, "Paul Arnway," painted on it.

Not ten steps away lay the body of Iron Mack's victim.

All unconscious of the ghastly spectacle which the shallow hole concealed, the girl opened the gate and walked swiftly toward the house.

No one answered the knock at the door.

Surprised at the absence of the housekeeper, who had invited her to come to the place that afternoon, the girl stood irresolutely on the veranda for several minutes.

"Mrs. Damon would not have gone away without sending me word," she said to herself, "for she is very particular about making and keeping appointments. Perhaps she is ill."

The girl shook the door with a violence that threatened to wrench it from its hinges.

After this demonstration she thought she heard a faint moaning sound from within.

"She is ill," was the girl's instant decision, "and she is locked in. Strange, indeed."

She did not hesitate an instant as to her course.

Procuring an ax from the shed, she beat down the door and effected an entrance.

In the bedroom she found, not Mrs. Damon, but Mona Caine.

When she had released that young lady she interrupted Mona's flow of thanks by saying, anxiously:

"I am Carrie Hames, Farmer Arnway's niece, and I came here to see my old friend, Mrs. Damon. Where is she?"

"I do not know, but I fear she has met with foul play."

Carrie Hames' face paled.

"I—I suppose your story will explain matters," she said, hurriedly, as she sank into a chair.

"To some extent, yes."

Mona then told her, in as few words as possible, what had occurred.

Carrie Hames believed, when the story was ended, that Mrs. Damon had been murdered.

After an hour's search the body of the housekeeper was found in the old well.

"Uncle ought to have been here at the time these horrible men arrived," said Carrie, as they were walking down the path toward the gate, for the purpose of notifying the village authorities. "He left the Bottoms about an hour before I did, and said he was going to the old house to see Mrs. Damon about the purchase of the growing grain. He sold the place to her a few days ago, you must understand, and now he wanted to make a bargain with her about the grain. I would have gone with him if I hadn't been busy."

A dark suspicion made Mona say, quickly:

"Will you describe your uncle's appearance?"

Carrie Hames did so.

Mona uttered a cry of horror.

"He was murdered, too," she said, in a low voice, "and by the same monster who killed Mrs. Damon."

When Carrie Hames had recovered from the shock produced by Mona's startling intelligence, she said, in a cold hard voice:

"If the law does not overtake and punish the villain I will."

"I am glad you exempt my half-brother from your vengeance," said Mona, gratefully.

"The murderer was the other man, and he it was, also, who insulted me in town," was the quick rejoinder.

Blood is thicker than water, and though Caxton Bent had shown himself to be a scoundrel of the deepest dye, yet Mona Caine could not bring herself to assist justice in overtaking and punishing him.

After the girls had passed out of the gate they made search for the body of Farmer Arnway.

It was not long before they found it.

Before dark the two victims of Iron Mack's murderous arm were lying in the morgue at Flint's Bottoms, and the local officers were scouring the country in all directions in search of the outlaws.

Carrie Hames was a school-teacher, and resided in a modest cottage with her widowed mother.

Her school was now enjoying a week's vacation.

Mona Caine passed the night with her, and in the privacy of the school-teacher's sleeping apartments they exchanged many confidences.

Mona said she had known Mrs. Damon, the deceased housekeeper, in Macon, Georgia, and that they had corresponded for several years.

"When I came North last month, to visit an aunt, a few miles from Bellfield," she said, "I resolved not to return home until I had seen Mrs. Damon. She was a great friend of Perry Bowdeen's father."

It was shortly after this that Mona began to speak of her half-brother.

"I never knew until I met him this afternoon," she said, "that he bore any relationship to me."

"Had you ever heard of him before?"

"Yes. The name of Caxton Bent, the highwayman, was well known to me. I knew, also, that he had robbed my father, and that Perry Bowdeen was hunting him."

"I have heard of Mr. Bowdeen," said Carrie Hames. "He is one of the shrewdest and most fearless detectives in the West, and an honest and gallant gentleman, besides."

Mona's cheeks flushed with pleasure at this compliment to her lover's character and capabilities.

"He was anxious to arrest Caxton Bent," the fair Georgian went on, "but not wholly on account of the reward. He had a personal reason for desiring to see the robber of my father behind bolts and bars."

"I am sure that it must have been a strong one."

"It was. Mr. Bowdeen arrested him for his first crime, and he swore when the verdict of guilty was rendered by the jury that he would get even with my father—the detective so soon as his sentence should expire."

"He was as good as his word. When he was discharged he returned to Macon, and after forging Mr.

Bowdeen's name for five thousand dollars, went to Missouri and joined Jesse James' gang of outlaws.

"The mere act of joining was as nothing compared with the act of meanness which accompanied it. I don't like to say harsh things of my half-brother, but I can't help it, when I think of what he has done."

"Never mind the rest," said Carrie Hames, quickly.

"No. I must tell you all, now that I have commenced. My half-brother joined the outlaw band, not as Caxton Bent, but as Perry Bowdeen."

"I see."

"He represented himself to be the noted Georgia detective, and said he was tired of chasing down thieves for rewards which were never paid, and desired to become a thief himself. In a week every newspaper in the West had published paragraphs stating that Perry Bowdeen had become a member of Jesse James' band."

"Naturally, Mr. Bowdeen was very angry," continued Mona, "when he read these reports. He did his best to have them corrected, but the news, once spread broadcast, was hard to follow up and deny. 'My only hope of righting myself before the world in proper shape,' said he to me, 'is to run this miscreant down, and put him back in prison, where he belongs.'"

"It was not long after this that Caxton Bent betrayed Jesse James, as he had betrayed others who had placed confidence in his word. Coming to Macon in disguise, he robbed my father, and was the cause of the latter's death."

Much more was said on this and other subjects before sleep came to the eyelids of Mona and Carrie.

And while they slumbered one of the most daring robberies in the criminal annals of Kansas was being perpetrated at Bellfield.

CHAPTER VIII.

A PECULIAR BANK ROBBERY.

The two outlaws did not return to Bellfield on horseback.

The venture would hardly have proven a safe one after the tragic occurrences at Flint's Bottoms.

When within a mile or so of Bellfield they met a farmer's boy who agreed for a dollar to return the two horses to the stable at which they had been hired.

When the boy with his charges had disappeared from view they hurried to some thick woods, a short distance away, in the deep recesses of which they remained until after dark.

Iron Mack was the first to emerge into the road again.

He was no longer the commercial traveler, but a black-faced son of Africa, in a coarse woolen shirt and jumper.

The articles had been stolen from a cabin in the woods, the owner of which chanced to be absent.

Fifteen minutes afterward Caxton Bent came out of the bushes.

He had found a pair of scissors in the cabin, and a haircut and the substitution of a short, grayish beard for the one formerly worn, had so changed his appearance that no citizen of Flint's Bottoms would ever have taken him for one of the pair of desperadoes who had that afternoon terrorized the town and helped to kill several of its inhabitants.

Shortly after midnight, the partners met in the shadow

of a wall across the street from the Bellfield Savings Bank.

"I have piped off the bank again," said Iron Mack, in a low whisper, "and there's some one in the inner office."

"What's he doing?"

"Writing."

"Then it's the cashier, probably."

"Not likely."

"What's to be done?"

"We'll have to rob the bank, just the same," said Iron Mack, with quiet decision.

"All right. You lead and I'll follow."

They crossed the street and passed down the side of the bank building to the yard, where the agricultural implements were stored.

Entering the yard, after having assured themselves that their movements were not being observed by any late pedestrian or patrolling watchman, they crept to the rear door with the iron shutters.

It was now that Iron Mack made his first trial of Gib Yost's invention.

Taking from his bosom a weighty article done up in a handkerchief, he brought it to view in the dim light of the stars, and felt of it critically.

"Right as a trivet in every particular," he muttered. "Now we'll see how the thing works."

Soon the drill attached to the machine began its labors, and so speedily and deftly was the work done that in less than five minutes the two burglars were in the little wash and storeroom of the bank, adjoining which was the office, where the cashier, as Bent had rightly conjectured, was now working.

Approaching the communicating door on tiptoe, Iron Mack knelt and put his eye to the keyhole.

The key was out, and he could see the cashier plainly.

The man was poring over a large book, with a frowning face.

"The bank commissioners will be here in the morning," the outlaw heard him mutter, "and unless I can fix up the book to fool them, I'm a gone coon."

On the reckless impulse of the moment, Iron Mack knocked loudly at the door.

"Who—who's there!" exclaimed the startled cashier.

"One of the bank commissioners," was the hoarse reply.

The cashier stared wildly at the door; but made no move to leave his seat.

Mack tried the knob.

The door was not locked.

Entering quickly, he presented a pistol at the frightened bank official's head.

"We'll fix your book for you," said Jesse James' friend, coolly, "but before you pass it over for us to monkey with, just open the door of that vault."

The cashier hastily complied with the demand.

"Now open the big safe."

"I can't. The combination was changed this afternoon, and is known only to the president."

"Rats!" was Caxton Bent's contemptuous ejaculation.

"It is a fact, sir," said the trembling cashier. "You may shoot me if you like—I don't care much one way or the other—but I can't open that safe for you."

"Been hitting the money drawers a lick yourself, have you?" sneered Iron Mack.

"I may as well confess that I have," replied the cashier, humbly.

"President suspected something, and so took the combination out of your hands, eh?"

"That's it, sir."

"And so you were trying to fix the books when we came in, so as to cover up your tracks, I reckon."

The cashier bowed his guilty head.

"Well," said Iron Mack, after a pause, during which he had eyed the confessed thief closely, "I suppose there's but one thing to be done, and that is to give Yost's invention another chance. Just keep an eye on the cashier, Caxey, my boy, while I turn the business loose."

Nineteen minutes of drilling and forcing and turning, and the big safe door was pulled open.

"What did I tell you?" cried Iron Mack, with enthusiasm. "Isn't she a daisy?"

"She's a world-beater."

The combination on the safe deposit box within proved no bar to the skillful bank burglar's progress, and the entire contents of the safe were soon spread out on the floor of the office.

"This will be charged to you," said Iron Mack, with a malicious chuckle, as he proceeded to stow away a large portion of the money in his pockets.

When the stolen funds of the bank had been disposed of, Iron Mack turned to the cashier and said:

"When you got through fooling with the books, what did you intend to do?"

"Go home."

"Are you married?"

"No."

"Got a girl?"

"Yes."

"What's her name?"

"Carrie Hames."

"Where does she live?"

"In Flint's Bottoms."

"Say, partner," put in Caxton Bent at this juncture, "what are you wasting time in asking such fool questions for? Let's dispose of this mug and then light out."

"Wait," returned Iron Mack, "you'll see what I'm driving at."

Then fixing his eyes again on the cashier, he said:

"Girl goes with another fellow sometimes, doesn't she?"

"Yes, with my brother."

"I saw them yesterday afternoon."

"Where?"

"In Flint's Bottoms, and he was with your girl. He must be your twin brother, he looks so much like you?"

"He is."

Caxton Bent whistled softly.

"Oho," he said, with a glance of admiration at his partner, "I see the point now. The girl we met, and who—"

"Let me kiss her," interrupted Iron Mack, with a satisfied smile, "is this gentleman's sweetheart?"

The cashier forgot his fear at the robber's unblushing statement.

His face was red with wrath, as he hotly exclaimed:

"You lie! She never let you kiss her."

Iron Mack gazed at the excited cashier with an amused smile.

"No, sonny," he quietly rejoined, "she did not let me

kiss her. But," smacking his lips in pleased recollection of what had occurred, "I kissed her, all the same."

He ceased speaking just in time to receive a sav-
blow on the mouth from the fist of the man whose
fingers he had been trifling with.

Caxton Bent pulled his pistol and would have shot
cashier had not Iron Mack lifted a protesting hand.

"No," he said, sternly, "I have a better idea."

The door of the vault was open.

Flinging the cashier to the floor as if he had been
child, Iron Mack proceeded to bind and gag him.

"Now, you miserable cur," Iron Mack hissed, "I'll
you enjoy a few hours of sheol. The air will be mig-
close when I lock you in, and it may be that there will
be much breath in your body when the president comes
around in the forenoon to see how much money you have
refrained from stealing. Ta, ta!"

Clang! went the heavy door.

A few turns of the knob and the cashier was locked

It was now two o'clock, about three hours before dawn
light.

The two bold operators were about to leave the office
and make their escape by the back door, when they heard
a key turn in a lock in the front door of the building.

Caxton Bent was hurrying away, but Iron Mack
sternly commanded him, in a whisper, to wait.

"If it's the president, we'll have some fun with him."

Presently, the robbers heard footsteps on the marble
floor of the business department, and then the low sound
of voices.

More than one person had entered.

It was not until the knob of the door opening into the
office was turned that Iron Mack thought of retreating.

But he stopped when half-way across the apartment
for the door sought to be opened by the unknown party
in the bank was locked.

"Hello, in there!" called out a stern baritone.

No answer.

"Cashier Stelly!" said the voice again. "Are you
there?"

"Who are you?" Iron Mack asked, in a hoarse, squeal-
ing tone.

"Mr. Ames, the president."

"Who else?"

"Some of the directors."

"Any officers?"

No answer.

"The constable and probably the night watchman are
with him," whispered Iron Mack to Bent. "Now watch
me, and I'll start a circus."

Walking up to the door, he put his mouth to the key-
hole and said, in a loud whisper:

"I'll confess everything if you'll come in here alone."

"Will you?" exclaimed the president of the bank
quickly.

"Yes."

"Then I'll come in when you open the door."

"Send the others away first. Just tell them to go out
on the sidewalk for a few minutes."

"All right."

Without the least suspicion of the trick that was being
played upon him, and firmly believing that the hoarse
voice within came from the throat of the guilty cashier,
the president of the bank went up to the three persons

who had accompanied him—a director and two officers—and asked them to step outside for a little while.

When they reached the sidewalk, and closed the front door after them, Iron Mack opened the office door.

The president, a slight man of small stature, was seized by the throat and flung quickly to the floor.

In a twinkling he was bound and gagged.

After his pockets had been searched for valuables, Iron Mack opened the door of the vault and bundled the president in to keep his cashier company.

After closing the door for the second time, the reckless representative of Jesse James sat down in a chair and chuckled like a fiend over the success of his trick.

"Got any whisky in your bottle, Cax?" he said; "mine's all gone."

"There are a few drinks left. Help yourself."

Iron Mack took a strong pull at his partner's bottle.

"Ah!" he cried, as he smacked his lips in satisfaction. "Now I am ready to tackle the world."

He opened the office door slightly and called out in a voice that bore some resemblance to that of the president:

"All right. Come right in."

The front door opened quickly, and the two officers and the bank director walked in.

The director took the lead.

He opened the door of the office, to be seized by the coat collar by Iron Mack and flung roughly into the arms of Caxton Bent.

The next instant the two officers met with an unwelcome surprise.

With a clubbed revolver, the devil-may-care representative of Jesse James dashed at them with ferocity of a tiger.

Taken unawares, and being but ordinary men withal, they were speedily brought to utter subjection.

Bruised, bleeding and dazed, they were dragged into the office, and, with the director, were quickly tumbled into the vault.

That receptacle now held five prisoners.

Iron Mack banged the door to and locked it.

Panting from exertion and excitement, he sank into a chair, and took the last drink out of his partner's bottle.

"We're on top now," he said, as he rubbed his hands in wicked glee. "No one to give us away before the next job begins."

"That's so."

"Ten o'clock is the hour for the bank opening, but it will be eleven at least before the vault is opened and the five galoots released."

"They may be all dead before that time."

"So much the better. Say?"

"Well, what is it?"

"I've got an idea?"

"About the other bank?"

"No. It relates to the girl."

"Mona Caine?"

"Yes."

"She's all right."

"Maybe; but there's a chance that we won't be all right if we fail to go out to the house where we left her before daylight."

"You don't think she has escaped, do you?"

Bent turned pale at the thought.

"I know that unless I'm dead sure that she is where I put her, I'd be a bigger fool than Thompson's colt if I went ahead with the Jesse James racket at the other bank."

"Jesse James used to take the most desperate chances. He didn't care a continental whether a whole town opposed him, or one man."

"Neither do I; but I'm no fool. The fact is, Bent," continued Iron Mack, in a graver voice than usual, "I am more afraid of that little vixen than a whole regiment of men. She is down on me, and I believe she would go through fire and water to do me an injury."

"So would the other."

"Carrie Hames?"

"Yes."

"You're right," with a sigh. "She does not love me overmuch, and that's a fact. It's lucky I know her name, for I now see a way to square things with her."

"How?"

"Through her lover, the cashier."

"Square things? Why, she'll hate you worse than ever for your treatment of the fellow."

"Will she? Just wait and see."

Iron Mack arose from his chair, unlocked the vault door, and dragged the half-insensible cashier into the office.

The door was then shut as before.

Removing the gag and bonds, Iron Mack waited until his victim had drawn a number of deep, full breaths, and then he said, quietly:

"If I gave you five thousand dollars, what would you do with the money?"

"Leave the country and go to Mexico."

"Do you think Miss Hames would go with you if you asked her?"

"Yes."

"She does not know you are a thief, does she?"

The cashier lowered his eyes and sighed.

"No," he said, in a low voice, "she thinks me an honest man."

"She won't think it if she consents to go to Mexico."

"Oh, yes, she will," replied the cashier, quickly and earnestly, "for I have been planning to go there for a year. My brother owns a coffee plantation in the State of Chiapas, and it is to that section that I would go."

"I will give you five thousand dollars," said Iron Mack, slowly, "if you will do two things. The first thing is to write a letter to Miss Hames, asking her to come to you immediately, because you intend to start for Mexico by the next train; the second is, to start for Mexico by that train."

"I will do as you say."

The cashier's face lighted up with hope and joy.

Iron Mack pointed to the desk.

Pretty Carrie Hames' guilty lover took a seat in front of it, and, taking up pen, wrote the following at Iron Mack's dictation:

MY DARLING: I have just received a telegram from my brother requesting me to start immediately for Mexico, as he is very ill. I desire to see you before I go. Come at once to the hollow near the old Arway house. I have immediate business in that neighborhood.

JOHN STELLY.

"She'll go out in that direction cheerfully," the

cashier remarked, when he laid down his pen, "for Arnway is her uncle."

"The deuce you say!" ejaculated Iron Mack.

The cashier looked at the outlaw in amazement.

At the moment a faint suspicion entered his mind that Iron Mack might have a sinister motive in desiring him to write the note.

"Why does the statement surprise you?" he asked, in as steady a voice as he was able to command.

"Because"—he hesitated and looked to Caxton Bent for a suggestion that might help him out of the difficulty.

Rube Burrows' nephew spoke quickly, and without reflection.

"Because the farmer was killed yesterday afternoon. Hadn't you heard of it?"

"No."

The cashier's face became ghastly pale on the instant.

He reached out his hand to take the note which he had written, but Iron Mack snatched it from the desk and put it in his pocket.

"I refuse to do your bidding," the poor wretch said, defiantly. "I will not go to Mexico."

"How about the five thousand?" asked Iron Mack, with a sneer.

"I don't want the money."

"I'll tell Carrie that you've gone back on her when I deliver the note, and ask for more kisses."

The cashier clenched his hands, and for the second time would have assaulted his brutal tormentor, if a cocked pistol had not been thrust under his nose.

"Let's end this farce," cried Caxton Bent, impatiently, "for it is nearly three o'clock."

"I'm agreeable."

Into the vault again went John Stelly, and when the heavy door had closed upon him the two outlaws left the building.

But the adventures of the night were not yet over.

CHAPTER IX.

IRON MACK DISCOVERS THE TRUTH.

While coming into town the afternoon before, Iron Mack and Caxton Bent had noticed a number of fine horses cropping the grass in a field, in one corner of which was a large, open shed, with a dozen or more rude stalls.

"We've got to ride, if we expect to get back to Bellfield on time," said Jesse James' friend, firmly, "and, therefore, I reckon one man's horses are as good as another's for our purpose."

To the field they went, and in the shed found two horses to their liking, and bridles to fit them hanging on a peg.

Each was an experienced and fearless rider, and as much at home bareback as in the saddle.

It was close upon daylight when they alighted in front of the farmhouse that had once belonged to Paul Arnway.

Their surprise and alarm may be imagined when they found that Mona Caine had escaped.

A look at the pieces of cord on the floor of the bed-

room, where she had been imprisoned, showed that she had been cut with a sharp knife.

"Some one did the trick for her," grunted Iron Mack as he looked at his companion with a gloomy brow.

"It was a woman," returned Caxton Bent, "for he is her glove."

He had picked it up near the door.

Iron Mack took it, turned it over in his hand, and put it to his nose.

"Ah!" he savagely exclaimed, "I know who the heifer was. Miss Hames, the farmer's niece, and the sweet heart of the bold, bad cashier."

"How do you know she is the owner of that glove?" queried Caxton Bent, in astonishment.

"By the perfume. See?"

Rube Burrows' nephew took the glove and smelled of it.

"Heliotrope," he remarked. "But how do you know that is the perfume she uses?"

Iron Mack grinned.

"How do I know? Didn't I kiss her three times? Bah! you make me tired. You've got no more sense than a Chicago dude."

Footsteps on the veranda caused Iron Mack's answer to die on his lips.

He grasped the situation in a flash.

Mona Caine had advised the local officers to give the farmhouse an early call, on the chance that the outlaw might return to see if she were still bound and gagged.

"Shall we stay here and give it to 'em when they come in?" whispered Bent, as he drew his revolver.

"No; let's waltz out and meet 'em."

Iron Mack spoke with perfect coolness, and, springing from the bedroom into the main apartment, he commenced to blaze away with his pistols, just as the officers were entering the door.

Day was breaking, and the sight of the tall, black-faced figure, with the fiercely-gleaming eyes and warlike demonstrations, made the little force scatter without an attempt at defense.

One man had fallen with a bullet from Iron Mack's pistol in his brain, and his three companions were scurrying down the path as fast as their legs could carry them, when the two outlaws appeared in the doorway.

Crack! crack! went the pistols, and another representative of the law went down.

With a wild yell, Iron Mack dashed after the two who were still unhurt.

Caxton Bent followed him.

At the yell, one of the men turned and made a stand, but he was trembling so violently when he fired his first shot that the bullet struck a tree instead of an enemy.

The next instant he was lying mortally wounded in the path.

Iron Mack gave his body a kick as he passed, and running toward the gate with the speed of a deer, intercepted the last officer before he could reach the road.

Drawing his bowie-knife from its sheath, he raised it above his head and then flung it with all his force at the man he was pursuing.

The weapon shot through the air, and the point of the sharp blade entered the victim's neck at the back and severed the spinal cord.

The officer swayed, then fell forward—dead.

Remounting their horses, the outlaws rode into Flint's Bottoms, meeting no one at that early hour, until they came to a saloon, which was just opening for the day's business.

Iron Mack ordered drinks quietly, paid for them, and then asked the barkeeper where Miss Hames lived.

Disguised as a negro, he felt called upon to use the negro dialect.

"We's bin out sarchin' fo' de evil pussons w'at killed listah Arnway, sah," he explained, "and my pardnah, eah, says dat ef he cud see Miss Carrie a minute, dat e cud git mo' p'intins dan w'at we's got now."

Having received the desired information, they left the saloon and rode toward the cottage where Carrie Hames and her mother resided.

It was not yet six o'clock, and yet Carrie and Mona were up and in the garden.

The terrible events of the preceding day had rendered them restless, and they had risen at dawn.

Caxton Bent did not dare trust his disguise before the sharp eyes of his half-sister, so he remained out of sight while Iron Mack, as the negro, rode up to the front porch.

Carrie Hames saw him and came forward without hesitation.

"Is yo' Miss Hames?" he asked, as he took off his hat and bowed.

"Yes."

"Den dis billy dux mus' be fo' yo' eyes."

He handed her the note written by John Stelly, the thief.

"Strange!" she said to herself, as she read. "Why didn't he have come himself?"

The false dandy answered the question by saying, respectfully:

"He done say to me dat he can't collect some money at a man up dar by the farm owes him, and' com' up h'ere too, kase he ain' got de time."

"Where was he when he gave you the note?"

"Bellfield."

"Did he receive the telegram this morning or last night?"

"It cum fru las' night, so he tole me, Miss Hames, 'bout dat yo' might ax me ques'tions about it. An' he told me dat he didn' get it twel' dis mawnin' when he got to his room, kase he bin up all night lookin' arter a sick nigger."

"He told you all this, did he?"

"He did, fo' suah."

Miss Hames read the note for the second time.

When she called Mona Caine to her.

The latter looked at the disguised outlaw with suspicion.

"What do you think of this?" asked Carrie, handing the note to her.

"Is the handwriting Mr. Stelly's?"

"Yes."

"Is he a man to be trusted?"

"I have promised to marry him," was the proud reply. "When I should go to the hollow as he requests."

"I wish you could go with me."

"I can and will, but I need not be present at your interview with Mr. Stelly. I can remain within sight."

While the young ladies went indoors to prepare for the

journey, Iron Mack hurried to Caxton Bent's side and exchanged a few words with him.

Mona and Carrie came out at the expiration of a few minutes and walked with quick steps down the road which led to the hollow.

The distance to be traversed was not quite a mile.

Iron Mack went ahead, while behind them, at a discreet distance, rode Caxton Bent.

The hollow was reached in good time.

It was within a few rods of the gate behind which lay the dead body of the officer, slain with Iron Mack's knife.

Surprised to find that her lover was not there, Carrie Hames turned her black eyes on the false negro in puzzled inquiry.

"He done say yo' was to wait fo' him," said the latter, in a matter-of-fact voice.

The next moment Caxton Bent rode down the incline toward them.

Mona Caine gave him one glance and then uttered a cry of alarm.

"We have been deceived," she said, as she clutched her companion by the arm and moved away from the disguised outlaw who had brought them to the spot.

"That man on horseback is my half-brother."

"And I am his partner," said Iron Mack, coolly, in his natural voice.

Carrie Hames was as brave a girl as ever lived, but at the announcement that the man with the black face who stood before her was the fiend who had committed the two murders of the day before, she turned pale as death.

But Mona Caine met the dreaded outlaw's wicked gaze without fear.

"And you are the man," she said, boldly, "who stabbed Perry Bowdeen and left him for dead at the Bellfield station?"

"I am the man," he quietly returned.

His pistol was out as he spoke, and he had her covered.

Caxton Bent occupied a similar relation to Carrie Hames.

"Why did you do it? Had he ever wronged you personally?"

"He had wronged a friend of mine."

"Jesse James?" she asked, eagerly.

Ever since her last talk with Caxton Bent she had been "putting two and two together."

Gifted with a quick wit and a shrewd intelligence, she thought she saw a way out of her present trouble, as she noted the look of fear that came into her half-brother's face when she asked the last question.

"Yes," replied Iron Mack, "the friend was Jesse James."

"Perry Bowdeen wronged him, you say. With an ob-

"It doesn't matter," fiercely. "Let it stand. I know that the wrong was such that the trouble the Border death. And," he added, as he gritted his teeth and scowled at her ferociously, "I will kill him, whether he is your lover or not."

"No you won't," she said with calm courage.

"Why won't I?"

"Because Perry Bowdeen—my partner—was never wronged by Jesse James' band, never wronged even knew him."

"She's crazy," interposed Caxton Bent, as he rode toward the hollow near the gate at the bullet fired at

listen, to her. Come, let's shut their mouths and get away from here."

Mona Caine turned on him with eyes that expressed both scorn and hate.

"He shall hear the truth," she cried, "even though you are my half-brother."

But the next instant a thought of what her revelation would bring about caused her eyes to fall and her slight frame to tremble violently.

If she informed Iron Mack that his present partner in crime was the villain who had wronged Jesse James, then her half-brother's death would immediately follow.

She had no thought of this awful consequence when she first resolved to undeceive the man who had stabbed her lover.

But Miss Hames had no such scruples.

Carried away by her desire to punish one or both of the villains, she cried out on the impulse of the moment:

"The man who played the part of Perry Bowdeen, who stole an honest man's name in order to commit a dastardly crime, is there."

She pointed her finger at Caxton Bent, who threw up his pistol hand at the moment of denunciation and turned the muzzle in Iron Mack's direction.

In that instant of excitement and peril he forgot that his partner wore a coat of mail.

The Border Cyclone looked at Bent with eyes of cold contempt and defiance, and on that moment the scar which had been painted out for the hundredth time that very morning, shone red and accusing upon his face.

"You cur!" he hissed. "You spawn of the devil's mistress; you traitor and thief, take that!"

Two shots rang out simultaneously.

When the reports died away, Iron Mack sat erect on his horse as before.

But Caxton Bent was on the ground with blood oozing from a ghastly wound in the head.

As Mona Caine bent over him, shudderingly, Iron Mack spoke these words, quickly, to Carrie Hames:

"I had intended to do you a terrible harm when I lured you to this place, but the service you have rendered me by unmasking the skunk who lies there as good as dead, makes me your debtor forever and a day. Good-by and good luck."

He turned his horse's head and was soon galloping horridly in the direction of Bellfield.

While met several people on the way, some on foot, and stalls, on horseback, but no one recognized the Border Cyclone.

"We" the man with the black face. field on before he came in sight of Bellfield he crossed a therefore, age which spanned a narrow creek.

other's for of mounted from his horse at this point, and, after To the field animal to a fence, went under the bridge.

horses to their ing the black from his face with his hand- a peg. section of his blouse, he threw the latter

Each was an aid and donned a red wig and false whiskers much at home bare and came forth in his shirt-sleeves and

It was close upon minutes after ten o'clock when he rode way. of Bellfield.

Their surprise and ink where the daring robbery of the found that Mona Cair committed were a large number of

A look at the pieces actors had yet arrived.

Iron Mack had guessed rightly when he said that would be eleven o'clock before the vault would be opened.

There was no whisky in his bottle, and he was stern and sober as he approached the other bank of Bellfield.

After leaving Caxton Bent dying, as he believed, upon the ground, he had determined to rob the second bank alone.

It would doubtless prove to be a desperate and dangerous undertaking, but after the sensational events of the morning the Border Cyclone was in the mood for an adventure, however perilous.

Leaving his horse in an alley half a block from the bank, Iron Mack walked down the sidewalk with his hands in his pockets, and whistling a patriotic air, until he came to the bank door.

Glancing inside he saw but two men.

One was the cashier, the other a depositor.

Whipping out his two revolvers, he entered the bank with a series of yells that made the cashier think that a lunatic asylum had broken loose.

But when he saw the fierce-looking desperado his knees trembled, and he put up his hands.

With one revolver pointed at the depositor's head, and the other at the cashier's, Iron Mack gave this harsh, insistent command:

"Plank down every cent in the vault and cash boxes of that counter, or I'll make a devil's monkey out of you in a holy minute."

CHAPTER X.

THE BORDER CYCLONE IN A TIGHT PLACE.

The depositor was a large man, of middle age, with a heavy jaw and cold, blue eyes.

"You're a fool," he growled, when Iron Mack pointed the pistol at his head. "Why don't you ask me to assist you?"

The outlaw stared at him in blank amazement.

This was queer talk to hear from one of the bank customers, surely.

"Who are you?"

"Lower that gun of yours and I'll whisper the name in your ear."

"No, you don't," returned Iron Mack, with a grim smile. "I'm dead onto such games as that. Pungle and quit your chin music."

"Ask the cashier who I am?" replied the man, with an eagerness that was mystifying.

The money from the safe was being dumped on the counter as the depositor spoke.

"Who is this funny mug?" queried the robber, sternly.

"He was released from prison last week."

"What's his name?"

"Gerald Drascow."

"What! The man who killed his father and robbed his mother?" cried Jesse James' friend, with a countenance expressive of the deepest repugnance and horror.

"Yes, I'm the man," said the heavy-jawed depositor coolly, "and I want you to know that I've served my time for what I did."

"Who's this fellow?" pointing to the cashier. "You son?"

"Yes."

"And you want me to take you in as a partner in this robbery business, eh?"

"I would much rather rob than be robbed."

"How does that proposition strike you, young man?"

"I arrogated Iron Mack of the cashier."

"I am powerless in the matter. Whatever is done will be done with my protest."

"All right, then," said the reckless outlaw, loudly, "the cashier's a whack. But, first, let's shake on the agreement."

The big ex-convict put out his coarse, heavy hand with a firm grip.

It was grasped by Iron Mack with a pressure that made the outlaw wince.

Then, to the latter's utter surprise and dismay, Iron Mack swung him around with one hand, while with the other, which held the pistol, he struck the man who had robbed his father and robbed his mother several heavy, murderous blows on the head.

The ex-convict dropped to the floor in an insensible condition.

After giving the body several vicious kicks, the Border Cyclone turned to the trembling cashier and said, with a cruel smile:

"Do you want to take up your father's fight?"

"Oh, no. He's a wretch, and deserves all he has got."

"What did you pay him just before I came in?"

"Five thousand dollars—money he deposited when he came to prison."

"That's all he's got in the world, I reckon?"

"It is."

"What did you pay him in, gold or notes?"

"Notes."

"Good."

Iron Mack stooped down, found the unconscious man's pocketbook, opened and looked it over quickly, and then thrust it into his bosom.

When this was done, he took from the counter all the money he could carry away conveniently, and then started for the door.

Before he reached it, J. P. Stayler, a laborer, walked in. He saw the Border Cyclone, and divining what had occurred, made a motion to draw his pistol.

"Back!" went Iron Mack's revolver, and Stayler uttered a cry and put his hand to his neck.

The bullet had cut the flesh under his chin, and had penetrated dangerously near the jugular.

"Back!" came a second shot, and the laborer fell to his knees with one leg useless.

In this position, and before the outlaw could shoot again, he got out his pistol and fired at Iron Mack's head. The terrible Border Cyclone received the bullet in his forehead.

It crashed through the jaw and then struck the glass pane in front of the gold counter and fell, a flattened mass at the cashier's feet.

Iron Mack spat a mouthful of blood and teeth, and, turning his head instinctively to escape another bloody finger, sent shot after shot in the direction of the man who had opposed him.

With the chambers of one revolver empty, and only three cartridges left in the other, the Border Cyclone stepped over the lifeless body of the laborer and walked out of the bank.

Near the door were a large number of people, who scattered like sheep when the wounded desperado appeared before them.

He looked up and down the street until the sign of a physician and surgeon caught his eye.

"I'll do it," he said, hoarsely to himself, "even if I turn up my toes when the job is done."

Rushing up the stairs of the building in which the surgeon's office was located, he entered the room without knocking.

A serious-faced young man sat at a table reading a book.

Iron Mack pointed a pistol at his head, and said, in quick, stern tones:

"Three questions, and you'd better answer them, if you want to live."

"What are they?"

The young man spoke calmly, though he was quaking inwardly.

"The first is this: Is there a back stairway to this building?"

"Yes."

"It opens into the alley, doesn't it?"

"Yes."

"Third question: Can you dress this wound of mine?"

The outlaw had spoken with difficulty, and mumbled his words, but managed to make himself understood.

While his broken jaw was being attended to, he kept his eyes fixed on the window which overlooked the street.

When he saw a small boy in the center of a crowd point his finger toward the window, he knew that moments were precious, and that if he escaped from the room alive he must act, and at once.

"Doctor," he mumbled, "tie a rag around my jaw as quick as the Lord will let you. Never mind any pretty business. My mouth has been swabbed out, and you've plugged up the hole. Hurry, for sheol will be turned loose if you don't."

Before he ended his speech the job was done.

Throwing down a twenty-dollar gold piece, Iron Mack, with his head so concealed by the bandages that only his eyes and nose could be seen, rushed out into the corridor and ran plump against the sheriff of the county, who had just come up the stairs.

The Border Cyclone struck out with his right, and as the sheriff staggered back against the wall from the effect of the blow, the man of crime came down on the officer's head with a clubbed revolver.

Other men were ascending the stairs as Iron Mack ran along the corridor toward the rear of the building.

He found the back stairs, went down them in a few bounds, and opened the alley door, to meet with an obstruction in the person of Mona Caine.

Back of her stood the farmer whose horse the Border Cyclone had purchased.

Worse than all, at the junction of the alley with the side street over a score of men were gathered.

Iron Mack was in a tight place.

CHAPTER XI.

A REQUISITION FROM MISSOURI.

When Iron Mack rode away from the hollow near the Farmer Arnoway gate, he felt sure that the bullet fired at

the murderer of Alice Lepugh, Jesse James' ward, had inflicted a mortal wound.

In this respect he was in error, for it had not been ordained that Caxton Bent should die so soon.

The bullet had indeed entered the skull, above the right eye, but had passed out again, after taking a curious course, and, luckily for the victim, without injuring the brain.

Mona Caine's first thought, after she saw that he was alive, though unconscious, was to save him from arrest.

Carrie Hames promised to assist her in this undertaking.

"I know what I'll say to the first person who sees him," said Mona, after her brows had been wrinkled for some time in troubled thought. "I will say that he was shot down by that terrible man whom the officers are searching for, because he is a detective. He was one, you know, or claimed to be," she added, half apologetically, "when he betrayed Jesse James."

"That will do," assented her friend, quickly.

"It will deceive everybody but the parties who saw the two men in town," Mona continued, "and there will be no difficulty in making them think that my half-brother is another person than the comrade of your uncle's murderer; if only we can get his coat off and hide it, together with his hat and this false beard."

The latter article had fallen off when Bent fell from his horse.

His face was now destitute of a hairy appendage, and as he lay in the dust with his eyes closed, and his cheeks pale and drawn, a marked resemblance to the countenance of his half-sister could be seen.

After the wound in the head had been bandaged, Mona, assisted by Carrie, removed Bent's coat.

Making a bundle of the coat, hat and beard, they found a good hiding-place in the hollow of a tree that stood near the fence.

They had just disposed of this incriminating evidence against the nephew of Rube Burrows, when a number of citizens came up, some of whom they had talked with after Mona's escape from the farmhouse.

"Where are the deputy sheriff and his men?" queried one of them, after a quick glance at the insensible outlaw.

"I don't know," replied Carrie Hamer.

"What's happened?" asked another citizen.

Mona told her story, and so artfully that her hearers were led to believe that her half-brother had been attacked by two men instead of one.

"They're the rascals the deputy was after," exclaimed the first speaker. "He told us he was going up to the house that Farmer Arnway used to live in, because one of you girls had hinted at the possibility of the murderers coming back to see if Miss Caine was where they had left her."

A peddler's wagon appeared when the man ceased speaking, and Mona induced the driver to convey the wounded desperado to the Bottoms.

After she had left him in the care of a doctor, she went to the house of Mrs. Hames.

There she found a stranger in earnest conversation with Carrie.

He was the Bellfield horse owner who had sold two of his animals to Iron Mack.

In search of the horse ridden by Caxton Bent, and

which Iron Mack had assured him was now in Miss Hames' charge, he had come to the Bottoms, intending to fulfill his agreement with the purchaser by keeping the animal until called for.

But when Miss Hames informed him that the horse had galloped on after his rider had been shot, and that the man who had paid him the two hundred dollars was a robber and a murderer, he determined to return to Bellfield immediately and hunt Iron Mack up.

"I don't want his dirty money," he said, with honest indignation, "and I'll give it back to him and help to send him to the gallows besides."

The horse owner had come to the Bottoms in a driving cart.

Mona Caine sat beside him on the return journey.

They reached the alley where Iron Mack had left the horse he had bought just as the Border Cyclone was leaving the office of the surgeon who had dressed his wound.

Suddenly, a cry arose behind them that the man who had robbed the bank was upstairs in the tallest building of the block.

"That's our man," Mona's companion said, grimly, "and if he is upstairs, I am going to prevent his escape by way of this alley."

Urged by a desire to assist the horse owner in his praiseworthy undertaking, and utterly regardless of the danger, the courageous girl was out of the cart in advance of her companion, and had reached the stairway door before he was half-way down the alley.

Iron Mack bestowed but one look upon the girl.

He could thrust her out of his way, he thought, as he would a fly.

The real danger lay beyond her, in the crowd which now filled up the mouth of the alley.

While he stood in an attitude of irresolution, the horse owner called out in a loud, indignant voice:

"Come here, you thief, and taken the stolen money which you gave me."

Iron Mack strode quickly to the daring man's side and coolly held out his hand.

The crowd remained stationary, not a member of which having courage to advance nearer to the man of blood.

The horse owner, whose honest indignation had for the time got the better of his prudence, put his hand in his vest pocket and drew out the notes which Iron Mack had given him a few hours before.

The outlaw took the money without a word.

He did not feel like using his tongue, anyway, on account of his broken jaw and the bandages tightly pressed against it.

But a look in his bloodshot eyes when the financial transaction was consummated made the horse owner shiver with fear.

Raising his pistol, he pointed it at the man's head, and a murder would have been committed then and there if Mona Caine had not approached the Border Cyclone from behind and caught his arm just as he was about to pull the trigger.

The movement destroyed his aim, and the bullet cut the empty air.

The brave and daring conduct of the girl infused some spirit into the men up the alley.

A number of them dashed down upon Iron Mack, some with revolvers, and some with guns, and began firing at

the moment when the desperate outlaw in an excess of brutal fury, struck Mona Caine full in the face and sent her reeling backward.

A bullet from a revolver struck him in the shoulder just as he was in the act of mounting the horse whose purchase money had been returned to him.

"Blaze away, curse you!" spoke the gleaming, defiant es, for the lips could not utter a word; and crack! crack! went gun and revolver, some of the leaden balls striking his person, others passing harmlessly over his head.

His coat of mail saved his life.

Had it not been for the steel plate across his breast, a counterpart of the one Jesse James wore, he would have fallen in the alley, never to rise again.

As it was, he urged his horse forward and dashed recklessly toward the crowd of his enemies, still huddled at the alley's mouth.

There was not a single shot left in his revolvers, but he waved them wildly, the men of Bellfield scattered, leaving two of their number to oppose the oncoming of the terrible desperado.

These two were officers, the one a deputy sheriff, the other a St. Louis detective named Fairbanks, who was visiting his aged mother in the little Kansas town.

Iron Mack tried to ride them down, but they held their ground, and two sharp reports rang out when the horse fell within a few paces of where they stood.

The Border Cyclone reeled in his saddle and his revolvers dropped from his hands and fell to the ground.

"Aha! we have him now!" shouted Fairbanks, and lunging forward, he caught the wounded terror about the waist and jerked him from his seat.

Iron Mack could make but feeble resistance, for he was wounded in the neck, and in both shoulders, while the bandages put on by the surgeon had been shot away and blood was oozing from the reopened wound in the

He was handcuffed and conveyed on a stretcher to the jail amid the wildest excitement, the whole town joining a procession behind.

Threats to lynch him were freely made, but no one dared bold enough to take the initiative in the matter.

Two days later he was removed to the county jail to await an examination for murder.

When the discovery of his many bloody deeds was made, the people arose in their might and attacked the

But the sheriff had foreseen this action, and had taken precautions accordingly.

When the jail door was broken down the mob found Iron Mack was not an inmate of the institution.

An hour before the attack he had been secretly placed in a covered carriage at the back entrance and driven directly to Oskaloosa, the seat of Jefferson County.

After remaining here for a fortnight, at the end of which time his wounds had healed so that he was able to talk about, a requisition arrived from Springfield, Mo., asking for his transfer to the jail at that place to await a charge of murder committed one year before, when he was a member of Jesse James' band.

The Border Cyclone smiled when the Missouri officer conferred with the papers for the transfer, and the smile broadened when, in answer to a question, the officer

informed him that the party who had raked up the Missouri affair as instrumental in procuring the requisition, was the redoubtable Frank James.

"He says you went back on Jesse, and that he'll take pleasure in seeing you swinging from the gallows."

"Where is Frank?" queried the Border Cyclone, with a grin of enjoyment.

"In the hills, hiding."

"How, then, could he work against me, as you say he did?"

"He has friends everywhere, even among the detectives. But he got a relative, an honest young fellow of Independence, to act for him."

"Relative's name Joyce?"

"Yes."

Iron Mack asked no more questions, but his heart was light when the officer left to arrange for the journey to Springfield.

CHAPTER XII.

JESSE JAMES TAKES A HAND.

Lynford Joyce, of Independence, Missouri, was not a relative of Frank James, as the officer had informed Iron Mack, though he had enjoyed that reputation for years.

To look into his smooth-shaven, guileless face and listen to his soft, deprecatory speech, one would have taken him to be a worthy exponent of every moral qualification.

As a matter of fact, he was morally rotten to the core, but so shrewdly had he worked his points that very few of the good people of Independence suspected that he was anything but the honest, law-respecting and mild-dispositioned young man he appeared to be.

For more than ten years he had been the confidential agent of the James boys, and the failure of the detectives to surround and capture the dread outlaws was due, mainly, to Joyce's secret arrangements and cunning devices.

His ostensible business was that of a cattle buyer, and therefore his frequent absences from home did not occasion any suspicion of wrongdoing.

"Jesse and Frank are distantly related to me," he had said more than once to the officers of Independence, "but I do not bear them any love on that account. They are criminals of the deepest dye, and deserve the halter."

Several times he had called at the office of the chief of police and exhibited letters from Frank or Jesse James which appeared to give a clew to their whereabouts.

But whenever an expedition was sent out on the strength of the information contained in these letters, no trace of the outlaws could be discovered.

The letters, it is almost needless to add, had been written at Lynford Joyce's instigation, in order to strengthen his reputation as a hater of crime.

Two days after the arrival of Iron Mack at the Oskaloosa jail, Joyce received the following letter from the hand of a trusted negro messenger:

CAMP SATISFACTION, Monday.

MY DEAR LYN: I have just learned that an old comrade and friend, Corey Mack, who has been well named the Border Cyclone, has been jugged in Kansas for trying to correct some

of the evils of over-population. He must be restored to liberty at whatever cost or risk. I have thought the matter over carefully, and have come to the conclusion that the trick can be successfully worked if Mack can be transferred from the jail at Oskaloosa to the jail at Springfield. There is one sure way to accomplish this, and that is working a formal killing on him. You remember the raid at Richland, don't you? Well, Mack laid out a cotton planter named Houston on that occasion, and the Grand Jury of Greene County brought in a true bill for murder against him. That was about a year ago. If he were to be tried for the crime to-day he might get off, for some of the witnesses are dead and others have left the State. But that consideration cuts no figure in my scheme. Let us get him to Springfield and he'll stand some chance of breathing the pure air again. What you must do is this: Go to the prosecuting attorney or one of the judges and represent yourself to be a friend of Houston, the dead planter; or better still, say that I have put you on to the business because I want to satisfy a personal grudge. You can forge a letter from me to show the law people, and no one will ever tumble to the little joker which it will contain. You may expect to hear from me again in a few days.

FRANK.

Joyce acted according to instructions.

He saw the prosecuting attorney, and that official, who was well acquainted with the particulars of the Richland murder, took it upon himself to see the Governor and secure the requisition papers.

On alighting at the depot at Springfield, Iron Mack saw Lynford Joyce standing by the side of the chief of police.

Glances of understanding were exchanged, and when the Border Cyclone was assisted into the police wagon Lynford Joyce managed to place in his hand a paper rolled into the shape of a bullet, without being perceived by any of the officers present.

The paper was a note of instructions, and when he was alone in his cell Iron Mack read it many times before destroying it.

"When they bring you before the judge," the note ran, "ask for time to plead and state that you have no lawyer. The court will not appoint one, for when you get through with your speech James Philkins will arise and offer to act for you. He is a new-comer, but a smarter lawyer can't be found in Missouri. And he is a thoroughbred besides. I know him and it's all fixed as to what he's to do. The first thing will be to obtain a change of quarters for you. He has a pull in the right place, and will get you where I want you to be in order that I may successfully carry out my plan."

The programme as above outlined was carried out, and three days after the Border Cyclone's arrival at the Springfield jail he occupied a cell in the main tank, where the majority of the prisoners were confined.

The next day the prison's force was swelled by the arrival of a tough-looking young man, who had been sentenced to thirty days' confinement for a disturbance of the peace. His name was Lanty Murdock, and he was in the employ of Frank James' agent, Lynford Joyce.

The lesser offenders were allowed the run of the corridor, but Iron Mack and a score of others, burglars, highwaymen, counterfeiters, etc., were locked up in the cells of a big cage which occupied the center of the tank.

A week passed, and Lanty Murdock was a trusty.

He had obtained the confidence of the jailer by assuming to be delighted with that official's methods, and by offering to play spy on those of the prisoners who were suspected of a daily infringement of some of the rules.

In his new rôle, Murdock was permitted to open the door of the cage, and one cloudy afternoon in March he felt that the time for decisive action had arrived.

"You may clean up in the corridor around the Lanty," said the jailer, when the trusty had appeared before him in his office and asked for something to do.

Murdock had been expecting this commission for several days, and he could scarcely conceal his joy at having taken the keys and went into the tank to perform his task.

But few of the prisoners charged with minor offenses could be depended upon in the jail-break which Murdock intended to inaugurate.

But while they might not join with him in his daring enterprise, they were not likely to interfere with it as it was being carried out.

The trusty had sounded a boy of sixteen named Shill, who was in for petty larceny, and found him willing and eager to assist.

To this boy was assigned the part of calling in the jailer at the proper moment.

It was while the misdemeanor prisoners were playing cards in a corner, where they were not within sight of the door of the cage, that Murdock called young Shill to him.

"Go for the jailer, quick," he whispered. "Tell Iron Mack has fallen in a fit."

The boy ran to the door opening into the office and knocked four times.

When the door was opened, he delivered his message in an agitated voice.

The jailer spoke a few words to his assistant, the guard on duty at the jail besides himself, and then hurried hastily to the cage, the door of which was open.

As he stepped into the corridor, Lanty Murdock, who was waiting for him, struck him a powerful blow on the head with a mop-handle, and followed it with a second that sent the jailer sprawling upon the floor.

The next moment Murdock slipped the great key which opened the door to the cells, and the dozen prisoners, headed by Iron Mack, rushed out.

The jailer was pummeled until his head was a mass of blood and bruises, and then bound and gagged, the tactics for the latter operation being furnished by the treacherous trusty.

Into the office the escaped prisoners next rushed, Murdock opening the door with the jailer's key.

The guard was felled by one blow from Iron Mack's powerful fist, and while he was being held down on the floor by young Stonehill and Pat Croak, a highwayman who had been awaiting sentence, Mack and Murdock tore away the telephone from the wall of the office, broke open a drawer that held half a dozen revolvers, several boxes of cartridges and a supply of knives, and rushed out into the town.

Within a block of the jail they scattered, Iron Mack striking out for the woods south of town, with Lanty Murdock for a companion.

Half an hour after the escape of the prisoners, two five determined officers were in pursuit.

Iron Mack had fully recovered from his wounds, and was in prime fighting condition at the time of the jail-break.

When the two escapes had gone about a mile into

oods, they sat down on the trunk of a fallen tree to rest for a few minutes.

Night was approaching, and under cover of the darkness they hoped to reach a point on the river where Frank James or Lynford Joyce would be found waiting for them.

"I reckon we've distanced the coppers," said Murdock, "he bit off a chew tobacco from a long, black plug."

"I think so."

"Pretty daring snoozers they are, too. I know 'em all except one, and they say—the other coppers do—that he chain lightning on stilts."

"Is he a member of the regular force?"

"No; he is a private detective."

"What makes you think he has turned out in the pursuit?" asked Iron Mack, with some interest.

"Because I heard him say to the jailer yesterday that he'd jump for joy when he saw you dangling at the end of a rope."

"What's his name?" demanded the Border Cyclone, "a murderous light came into his dark eyes."

"Black."

"Never heard of a detective of that name."

"He's from Illinois, he says. I piped his conversation to the jailer. It was mostly about you."

"Did he say why he hated me?"

"Yes."

"Well, what was his reason?"

"He said you had killed a relative of his in Kansas."

"What was the name of this relative? Did he give you?"

"No."

"What kind of a looking man is this fellow Black?"

"He is not as tall as you are, but he is as stout as an ox. His hair is light, and he wears neither mustache nor beard."

"Any scars on his face?"

"No."

"I didn't know but it might be Caxton Bent's ghost," remarked Iron Mack.

Lanty Murdock had heard the story of the Border Cyclone's Kansas experiences, and of the shooting of the Burrows' nephew, and knew that Mack believed his former partner to be dead.

On the day that Iron Mack was arrested in Bellfield, a report had reached town that Mona Caine's half-brother, who was stated to be a noted Georgia detective, had died from the effects of the wound inflicted by the former Arnway's murderer.

This report, sent out by an officer from Flint's Bottom, came to Iron Mack's ears in course of time, and was not contradicted while he remained in Kansas.

After fifteen minutes' rest on the fallen tree, the two fugitives arose to their feet and started forward again. They had gone but a short distance when a loud shout behind them announced that they had been discovered. Turning his head quickly, Iron Mack saw that his pursuers consisted of but two men.

One of them, the foremost, he instantly recognized. It was Perry Bowdeen, the detective.

CHAPTER XIII.

A NEW SCHEME OF ROBBERY.

"You tackle the other fellow and I'll attend to that tall detective," said the Border Cyclone, hurriedly, to his companion.

"All right."

Disdaining to seek the shelter of a tree, Iron Mack stepped out in full view of his pursuers and opened the ball with a pistol shot.

A few moments later two of the four combatants lay dead on the ground.

One was the companion of Perry Bowdeen; the other was Lanty Murdock.

Iron Mack and the detective stood erect and unharmed.

The result seemed to vex them both, for each had prided himself on being an excellent pistol shot.

While in the act of retreating—all the charges in their revolvers had been discharged—Iron Mack called out:

"Say, Bowdeen, let's settle this little affair of ours with knives."

"And give you a chance to search for my heart again? Not much."

"I took you for another man, then."

"I am not an expert with a knife."

"What is your favorite weapon?" with a sneer. "The scythe or cannon?"

"I might ask you the same question."

"Then I'd say fists!"

"What!"

"Fists. If you are not a coward, throw down your pistols and knife and meet me man to man. If you can best me there'll be nothing to prevent your taking me to camp. See?"

"I see that you are making a very silly proposition."

"Am I? If you'd let that mug of yours come in contact with this right duke of mine a few times you would think there was considerable sense in the offer."

Perry Bowdeen's handsome face flushed.

He prided himself on his fistic abilities, and to be thus taunted by the desperado was more than he could stand.

"I've no business to accept such an offer," he said, coolly, "but you are such a picturesque brute that I don't know but what I will indulge you. It may prove the easiest way of all," he added, "to effect your capture, for when I knock you out I've got you."

Iron Mack's face beamed with fierce pleasure.

He cast down his pistols and knife instantly.

Perry Bowdeen followed suit.

Next the two adversaries took off their coats and vests and rolled up their sleeves.

As they faced each other, ready for the encounter, it was hard to say who was the better favored, physically.

It can be put down for a fact, however, that two finer specimens of muscular manhood could not be found in the West.

Iron Mack had landed one blow on the detective's cheek and the latter was watching for an opening for his left, when there came a sharp detonation from one side, and Perry Bowdeen pressed his hand to his heart and fell slowly to the ground.

The Border Cyclone stood looking at the fallen man with eyes of amazement, when the pistol of the assassin

cracked again and a bullet drew blood from the side of Iron Mack's neck.

The shots had been fired from a clump of bushes, and before the smoke of the second one had cleared away, Iron Mack was dashing toward the spot with one of his revolvers, which he had snatched up, in his hand.

The crackling of dry twigs before Iron Mack reached the bushes told him that the unseen marksman was retreating.

"Coward!" yelled the reckless and infuriated outlaw, "why don't you show yourself and——"

"How can I if I am a coward?" answered a voice, which sounded strangely familiar.

The Border Cyclone blazed away in the direction of the voice, and the shot was returned.

No damage was done by either.

Through the bushes Iron Mack madly plunged, but it was not until he had gone half a mile that he caught a glimpse of his cowardly foe.

It was in the early evening, about half an hour after sunset, and coming upon a long open space by the bank of a small river, the outlaw saw his enemy jump into a boat and push off into the stream.

He had no hat on, and his face, in the distance, bore a striking resemblance to that of Caxton Bent.

"Pshaw! that can't be," muttered Iron Mack, as he ran forward to the bank, "for the hound who murdered Alice Lepugh is dead."

He emptied his revolver at the fleeing assassin, but none of the shots took effect.

The firing was not returned, as the boatman needed both hands to manage his craft, for the stream was swollen and had a swiftly-running current, caused by heavy rains which had recently fallen.

Iron Mack picked up the fugitive's hat on the shore of the river.

He looked at it with the keenest interest.

"Bent used to wear such a hat," he said to himself, with a puzzled expression on his dark face, "but this can't be his, for he is planted under six feet of Kansas earth. No, it belongs to another fellow, and here is his name on this fancy hat band inside—'Preston Black.'"

The boat had reached the other shore, and the assassin, now far out of range, shouted these words across the water:

"I'll get to your collar yet, if you are the Border Cyclone."

Iron Mack, for answer, kicked the hat into the stream.

Then he ran with all his might in the direction of a bridge, about half a mile below.

When he reached it, darkness had set in and he knew that it would be useless to continue the pursuit.

"So my enemy is Preston Black, the detective from

Illinois, is he?" he mused, as he walked along the bank toward the spot where he expected to meet Frank James or Lynford Joyce. "And he has a grudge against Perry Bowdeen, too, has he? Strange that he should hate us both. Now, if Claxton Bent were alive, I could understand the matter."

At the rendezvous the Border Cyclone found Lynford Joyce.

"Jesse and Frank dare not leave the hills for the present," the young man from Independence explained.

"Jesse!" exclaimed Iron Mack, in horror. "Are the ghosts of all the outlaws in Missouri walking around these parts?"

"What do you mean?" asked Joyce, perplexed.

"What do I mean! Didn't you just tell me Jesse James was hiding in the hills, when I know his brother was planted in Kansas City weeks ago?"

"Jesse James is not dead!"

As Joyce spoke these words, Iron Mack sprang to his feet in amazement. Then to the amazed Cyclone, Joyce related the events that led up to the report of Jesse James' wounding and to the report that he had been killed.

"The officers are now after Frank James," the young man added, "and every road leading to his hiding place is watched by them. They haven't the first idea that Jesse himself is with his brother, and that pretty soon the two James boys will work a plan to escape that will make the detectives look like a row of tin soldiers. So you see, for the present you must trust to me to put you on the road to safety."

Iron Mack, overjoyed at the news that Jesse James was not dead, as he supposed, but was still at the old stand, could scarcely control his delight.

He slapped Joyce on the back with frank heartiness.

"I'll trust you every time, my peacock. First thing you pard, take me as quick as you know how to where Jesse is!"

"No, no; it will be sure death to attempt it," hastily answered Joyce. "Besides, Jesse asked me, particularly to put you on to one of the richest schemes he ever ran up against. Since he can't attend to it, he wants you to. He says not to worry about him. By the time you get back he will be at the old stand again."

Iron Mack was thoughtful for a moment. He hated to leave Jesse James at this crisis, but he saw the wisdom of the plan and decided to undertake it.

"What's this scheme o' Jesse's?" he demanded, suddenly looking up at Joyce.

"It's a chance to pick up a fortune near Albuquerque, New Mexico."

"In what way?"

"By robbing a church."

Explain; I don't quite understand."

"Well, then," said Joyce, "here's the layout; the church is one of the oldest in America, and was founded by the Franciscan Fathers over a hundred years ago."

"It possesses a treasure, does it?"

"It should say it does. You must understand, Mack, a few years ago there was a big excitement over the Mexico diamond diggings."

"I remember all about it. The diggings petered out."

"So they did, for the reason that the diamonds had been nearly exhausted years before. The richest gems had been found by the Pueblo Indians and given or sold to the priests of the old mission church."

"Four years ago, Jesse and I met a drunken Spaniard in Las Vegas. It was while Frank and Jesse were giving the Mexicans a rattle across the border. The Spaniard was the most intelligent cuss I ever met. He was a Latin and Greek scholar, and what he didn't know about astronomy and mathematics and philosophy and hygiene was all such truck as that wasn't worth the trouble of figuring out, if you listen to my gentle voice."

"What was his business?"

"He was a confidence operator and sneakthief, but he had been a priest, and for years had officiated in a subordinate capacity at the old mission church near Albuquerque."

"I begin to see, Joyce."

"He was fired out of the church for drunkenness and immorality, and after drifting about the Territory for a year or more, settled down in Las Vegas, where I found him."

"We became very intimate, for I was resting on my sickbed, then. I had made a big stake at a railroad, and I found Las Vegas a good place for blowing my money."

"Paolo Guesta amused and interested me, and I staked him one night in order that he might give me a rattle, he opened his heart and told me all about the diamond treasure at the old mission church. It was vaulted under the altar, precious stones valued at a million dollars are hidden."

"The Border Cyclone whistled."

"That is a prize worth going after, surely," he said. "You bet your surcingle it is. When Frank and Jesse came back from Mexico I told them what I had learned about the disgraced priest, and asked them to stand in with me in making a raid on the church. What do you think?" Frank refused point-blank to go into the affair, but he finally won Jesse over to his way of thinking. "I had too much respect for religion to cut up such a fellow."

"Iron Mack laughed scornfully at the idea."

"About that time," Joyce continued, "I found it extremely hard to get out of New Mexico, and I haven't been there since. But many a night I have lain awake thinking

of the diamonds, and now that I am foot-loose, and Missouri and Kansas are too hot to hold me, I think I'll go to Albuquerque."

"I'll go with you," said Iron Mack, impulsively, "if you have no objection."

"Will you?" exclaimed Joyce, joyously. "Then we'll make the raffle as sure as guns."

"And I know what course to take to bring us rapidly over the border into the Indian Territory," resumed Iron Mack.

"We'll start to-night, then."

"Of course."

As the two men moved away a stout figure crept from behind a tree and cautiously followed them.

It was Preston Black, the detective from Illinois.

"I could have shot you down easily, Iron Mack," he muttered under his breath, as he moved along, "but your talk of this treasure has induced me to let you live a little while longer. You are bound for New Mexico, are you? So am I. You expect to become possessor of the diamonds, do you? So do I, and I'll play my last card with you when my hands close over the stones."

CHAPTER XIV.

PREPARING A TRAP FOR THE CYCLONE.

A month after the events recorded in the last chapter Perry Bowdeen received a welcome letter from his sweetheart, Mona Caine.

He had narrowly escaped death for the second time, the bullet fired from Caxton Bent's pistol having entered his side below the heart.

If it had not struck a rib and deflected, so the doctors said, his career would probably have ended within twenty-four hours after the infliction of the wound.

Preferring not to alarm Mona, he had not written to her of his condition, and had also taken pains to keep his name out of the papers.

As he was not known in Springfield to any one except the chief of police and one of his detectives, the latter arrangement had not been difficult to make.

Among other things, Mona said in her letter:

"Caxton Bent left here a week ago, as well as ever. He promised me faithfully not to molest you, and to leave the United States and go to Mexico, never to return."

"There is a probability that he will keep his promise regarding his departure from this country, for he has formed a strong friendship for John Stelly, the late cashier of the Bellfield bank, and Carrie Hames' former lover. This unfortunate man was found half dead in the bank vault on the forenoon of the capture of that terrible man, Corey Mack. His four companions in confinement were in the same condition. That Stelly was not prosecuted for misappropriating the bank funds was due to the solicitation of Carrie Hames, who is a dear friend of the president's wife. But Carrie will not carry out her promise to marry Stelly, though he believes that she will relent when he comes back from Mexico with a fortune honestly made."

"Caxton Bent says he has had enough of an evil life and swears that henceforth he will work for the law instead of against it."

against it. The people here look upon him as a detective, and by his smooth talk he has deceived everybody in regard to his real character, but his half-sister, your humble servant, and Carrie Hames.

"Carrie refuses to say whether she approves of the Mexican trip or not, but I know by her looks that she fears that no good will come from John Stelly's association with the man who was formerly the partner of the Border Cyclone. But as she is not at present on speaking terms with the ex-cashier, her views in the matter are not known to him."

Mona concluded with an injunction for Bowdeen to look out for Caxton Bent, who, she declared, was not to be trusted, in spite of his protestations of reform.

The detective laid the letter down and took up another which had come by the same post.

It was dated Santa Fe, June 25, and was from a Springfield detective who had been one of the pursuing party on the day of the jail-break.

He had been the first to find Perry Bowdeen lying senseless in the woods, and when about to start, two days later, for the Indian Territory, to continue the pursuit of Iron Mack, who had been seen with a companion making his way toward Honey Creek, he had promised to write or telegraph to his wounded friend the day that he struck the outlaw's trail.

Writing from Santa Fe a month after his departure, he said:

"I have to-day got my first news of the escaped murderer. I was in a saloon frequented by Mexicans and roughs, when who should come in but Preston Black, the Illinois detective. I had never been introduced to him, and I felt sure when he looked at me that he did not recognize me as any one he had seen before.

"My first impulse was to make myself known; my second, which I followed, was to say nothing and watch him. The fact is, I had never liked his looks nor his style, and I'll bet I'll find something crooked about him before I'm done with him.

"After looking about the saloon as if in search of some one, Black espied a little half-breed sitting in a corner playing solitaire.

"He went over to him quickly and they had an animated conversation in Spanish. I can speak the language like a native, and I was near enough to catch nearly all that was said.

"It seems that Black is here on the same errand as myself, and I heard the Mexican tell him, in answer to a question, that he had located Iron Mack at Albuquerque. Hooray! When I heard that I left the saloon and went to my room, where I now am. After I post this letter I shall take the local train for Larny, which leaves in half an hour, and there catch the down express of the Atchison road for Albuquerque. Before dark I expect to be in the same town with my quarry, and if I don't catch or kill him, then I'll quit the detective business and try wood-sawing or sewer-digging. You need not fear that I am going to take any great risks, for I am not. Mack does not know me, and I am going to take him by surprise. I'll have the local police to help me out, of course. Expect to hear good news, therefore, inside of three days. Yours hopefully,

"FITZPATRICK."

Poor fellow! He never wrote to Bowdeen again, and Mona Caine's lover waited a week after the receipt of the letter before he learned what had been the result of Fitzpatrick's visit to Albuquerque.

The wires told the story, and what they said was as follows:

"Last night at a Mexican dancehouse at the old town, Constable Pecos, assisted by a Missouri detective named Fitzpatrick and a posse, attempted to arrest two men suspected of being

concerned in several murders in Kansas and Missouri. The men resisted arrest, shot out the lights, and in the darkness made their escape. Fitzpatrick was killed and one of the posse was seriously wounded."

The next train for the southwest had Perry Bowdeen as a passenger.

He arrived at Albuquerque in the evening, and after supper was closeted with the marshal of the place more than an hour.

"If we can find the Illinois detective," the marshal said, at the conclusion of a long statement of the murder at the dancehouse, and the fruitless pursuit that had afterward followed, "we may strike our men."

"Why do you think so?" asked Bowdeen.

"Because the fellow has acted in such a way as to lead me to believe that he does not desire to arrest Iron Mack. Why, not two days ago, a Mexican came from Altameda who said he saw this Preston Black with his eye at the keyhole of the front door of an adobe that held the Border Cyclone and his partner. You must know that the Mexican, who is a stool of mine and can be trusted, located Iron Mack and the young fellow who has been with him ever since he entered the Territory at the adobe early in the evening. While he was watching the door from behind a huge cactus, he saw the Illinois detective steal up from the road where he had left his horse tied to a mesquite bush.

"The Mexican knew him by sight and reputation, and he expected, after the fellow had looked through the keyhole a while, to see him dash in or else attempt to drag Iron Mack out.

"But he did nothing of the kind. After staying at the door for ten minutes, he stole away noiselessly, remounted his horse, and rode away.

"I saw him the next morning, a few minutes after my interview with the Mexican, and asked him why he had not gone back to the adobe before this and arrested the murderer. His reply amazed me. 'What adobe?' he asked, with the most innocent air imaginable. When I informed him of what the Mexican had seen and knew, he declared, with an oath, that the Mexican lied; that he had never been to Altameda, and had no idea where Iron Mack was.

"Well, I went out to the adobe, of course, and without any loss of time. No outlaw was there, and I could not find any one who had seen any persons answering to the descriptions of the Border Cyclone and his partner about the place."

"Have you seen Preston Black since yesterday morning?" asked Bowdeen.

"No; I put the Mexican on his trail and may get word from him any minute."

But it was not until next morning that the marshal's spy reported at the office of his employer.

ry Bowdeen was there, and his face brightened the Mexican said he had found a man at a casa on the road to New Albuquerque who could probably furnish important information concerning both Preston Black and the Border Cyclone.

"He is not able to come to town," said the Mexican, in excellent English, "for he has been in a fight and has his leg broken."

The marshal and Bowdeen procured saddle horses with the spy as a guide, went out to the adobe building where the injured man was staying.

On account of the surprise of Mona Caine's lover when he learned the sufferer to be John Stelly, the ex-cashier of the Springfield bank.

Stelly's leg had been attended by an Indian doctor, and he was resting comfortably on a pile of blankets with a sack filled with straw for a pillow when the detective and the marshal entered.

Stelly's thin face flushed with shame when he saw Bowdeen.

"The way of the transgressor is hard," he said, with a sad smile, as he held out his hand.

The detective gave it a kindly grasp, and then asked Stelly how he came by his hurt.

"The man whom I called my friend is the cause of it," Stelly replied, bitterly.

"What Caxton Bent?"

"Stelly."

"Where in New Mexico?"

"He was last night."

"Why Bowdeen's handsome face darkened.

"You had a quarrel with him, did you?" he asked, looking at Stelly.

"Yes."

"Where did it take place?"

"At this adobe."

"Was he staying here, too?"

"Yes."

The ex-cashier then satisfied the detective's eager curiosity by the following statement:

"We came to New Mexico together, but when we got to Las Vegas he robbed me of all my money and disappeared. 'I was drunk at the time,' continued Stelly, with his eyes on the floor, 'and he had a long start on me when I came to my senses. But I found out which way he had taken and I followed him to New Albuquerque.'"

"He encountered him one night in a gambling joint, as one of the players, and was a heavy winner."

"Then he saw me he smiled and held up a roll of money. 'I waited and said nothing. After a while he came in his checks and came over to me.'"

"'I was drunk, myself,' he said, in his easy way, 'or I

never would have treated you so shamefully. Here, take this wad and forgive me.'

"I was fool enough to accept the money—the sum was more than he had stolen from me—and to let things go on as before. We took rooms at this casa, and I had no occasion to find fault with him until last night, when he came in drunk and said I had betrayed him."

"I asked him what he meant, and he said I had informed the officers that he was not Preston Black, the Illinois detective, but the former partner of Iron Mack, the bandit and murderer."

"I gave him the lie, and then he pitched into me."

Stelly paused to utter a deep sigh.

The announcement that Preston Black was Caxton Bent did not surprise Bowdeen, for he suspected the two were one and the same person ever since he had read Mona Caine's letter.

The marshal, whose face wore a puzzled expression, was speedily enlightened as to the character and misdeeds of Rube Burrows' nephew.

"But I can't understand," said the Albuquerque officer, "why Bent has spared Iron Mack's life. He hates him with deadly hate, evidently, and he came down here to find him. Yet, when he locates him he does nothing either in the way of bringing Mack to justice or of avenging his private wrongs."

"His conduct is strange."

"I think I can explain it," remarked the ex-cashier. "He knows what brought Iron Mack to New Mexico, and he is waiting to have his enemy do a certain little job before he strikes to kill."

"What is the job?" asked Perry Bowdeen, eagerly. "Do you know?"

"Yes. Bent told me all about it three days ago. We were sitting in the casa alone, drinking aguardiente, and he grew quite confidential. Iron Mack and his partner intend to rob the old mission church, five miles from here."

"Rob a Spanish church! What is there in one of these wrecks to tempt the cupidity of such a man as Iron Mack?" exclaimed the marshal, in astonishment.

"There are diamonds galore," said Stelly, quietly.

Then he told them what Bent had learned from listening to the conversation between Lynford Joyce and Iron Mack on the river bank the night of the latter's escape from the Springfield jail.

Perry Bowdeen's face wore a look of deep satisfaction when Stelly had concluded.

"Do you know the name of Mack's partner?" he asked.

"Yes. His name is Joyce, and for years he has been the confidential agent of the James boys."

"I know him, and he has played a very slick game indeed."

Stelly did not know when the attack on the church would be made.

"I can say this, however," he remarked: "Mack has been waiting for several weeks to get things to suit him. There are five priests at the church now, and when four of them go away for a certain purpose—I don't know what it is—then the robbery will be attempted."

"I will ascertain at once when the priests are to leave," said the marshal.

The conversation ended soon after this, and the detective and his companion rode on to the church.

They were admitted into the presence of the head priest, who informed them that his four associates had left to attend some special services at Fernandez de Taos, and that they would be gone two days.

"Then the attack will take place to-night," said Bowdeen.

"I think so."

When the good father was informed of the contemplated robbery, he lifted up his hands in holy horror.

But he made no objection to the plan proposed, by Perry Bowdeen for the protection of the diamonds.

From the church the marshal and the detective rode to Albuquerque.

At dusk they were again on the road, but well disguised.

Behind them came a detachment of United States cavalry.

"The Border Cyclone is a dozen desperadoes rolled into one," said Perry Bowdeen, when the details of the coming engagement were being discussed, "and if we want to make sure of getting him, dead or alive, then it will be policy to take a large force with us."

So the commander of the cavalrymen had been spoken to.

"Certainly, certainly," he said. "This fellow is a mail robber as well as a murderer, I understand, and therefore he has committed offenses against the Government."

In the meantime where were Iron Mack and Lynford Joyce?

CHAPTER XV.

A CAREER OF CRIME ENDED.

After a careful survey of the ground the Border Cyclone came to the conclusion not to make an attempt to steal the diamonds hidden under the church altar until the departure of the four priests for Fernandez de Taos.

"With only one old priest, and the dried-up Mexican serving man who does the work about the place to contend with, we can swipe the swag as easy as rolling off a log."

While waiting for the important day to come they oc-

cupied a deserted shepherd's cabin on the banks of a small stream, a branch of the Rio Puerco.

Armed to the teeth, and in a most satisfied frame of mind, they entered the little village of houses that surrounded the church about half an hour after the arrival of Perry Bowdeen, the marshal and the cavalrymen.

All was still as death when Iron Mack approached the gate in the high board fence which surrounded the abbey of the priests.

He rang the bell and then stepped back and clubbed his pistol.

The evil programme demanded that he should beat to death the person who should open the gate, no matter what it chanced to be the priest instead of the servant.

But when the gate opened, no face was seen.

Thinking the person who had answered his summons had stepped aside according to church custom—Iron Mack knew nothing about religious observances or the manners of priests—he stepped boldly into the inclosure.

Lynford Joyce followed quickly after him.

Both saw the terrible mistake they had made when the rifles of a dozen men were pointed at them, and the steady voice of Perry Bowdeen shouted these menacing words:

"Up with your hands or you are dead men."

Joyce threw up his hands.

But the Border Cyclone blazed away with his pistols.

The next instant a dozen bullets entered his body.

And yet he did not fall.

Steadying himself by catching hold of the gate, he was trying to raise one of his pistols for a last shot, when a man suddenly rushed past him from the outside.

It was Caxton Bent.

"Where is he?" he cried, with fierce energy. "Don't shoot him—he's my meat."

"Is he?"

The words were spoken faintly by the dying Cyclone, but they were heard by the man for whom they were intended.

Rube Burrows' nephew wheeled quickly to find himself face to face with his enemy.

Crack! went Iron Mack's pistol, and Caxton Bent fell over dead with a bullet in his brain, while upon his body dropped the dying murderer.

When Perry Bowdeen stepped forward Iron Mack's evil heart had ceased to beat.

Lynford Joyce surrendered without resistance, but that night he made his escape and was never recaptured.

Perry Bowdeen went back to Missouri and married the pretty Mona Caine.

John Stelly has given up all hope of ever seeing Carrie Hames.

He did not go to Mexico, but remained in the vicinity of Santa Fe to become a cowboy.

THE END.

Next week's issue (No. 3) will contain "Jesse James Dare-Devil Dance; or, Betrayed by One of Them," in which the further adventures of the noted Missouri Outlaw will be related.

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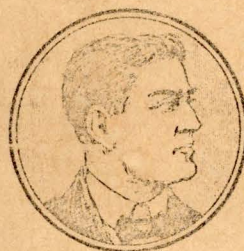


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